

**CULTIVATING RELIGIOUS MISFITS:
THE ROLE OF PLAY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

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**In Partial Fulfillment of
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Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
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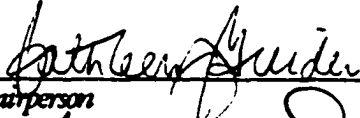
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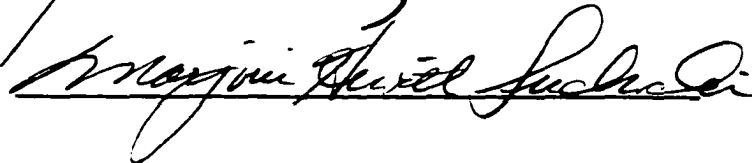
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ABSTRACT
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THE ROLE OF PLAY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

by

Michael Sherwood Koppel

This dissertation seeks to respond to the problem of pressured conformity in theological education and its implications for religious leadership. The development of creative religious leadership stands within the tension of conformity, on the one side, and idiosyncrasy, on the other. This work examines salugenic aspects of fostering religious leadership in order to assist persons and communities to meet the challenges and complexities of ministry in this era. The central thesis is that through the paradigm of play exercised in the context of theological education, “misfit” ministers—marginalized persons and those with marginalized qualities—have opportunity to hone the values and contain the potential misuse of their marginality and thereby contribute ethically to excellence in ministry. This writing makes explicit the theoretical underpinnings that support the development of what the author calls “healthy misfits” in ministry. Examination of misfits through this perspective demonstrates how misfits play differently than persons who identify with the dominant cultural paradigm, and therefore, can contribute to creative pastoral leadership in an era of change and transition. The argument holds that occasions of not fitting can serve as occasions for growth. Play supports human flourishing; through play we participate in recreating the world and model a process of faithful living. This dissertation is primarily a pastoral theological, and therefore philosophical, treatment of the subject matter, and employs a method called

“orchestrated engagement.” Insights from the lived experience of pastoral leaders inform the argument.

Theoretical tools and analysis include an examination of grief as a complex nexus of emotions that can open the possibility for play. Key principles of Donald W. Winnicott’s theory of play are explored in relation to misfit experience. Theological grounding in the thought of Gordon Kaufman and Bernard Loomer informs the development of a leadership model that builds on Ronald Heifetz’s theory of adaptive variability and analyzed in relation to the changing contexts of congregations as explored in the work of Nancy Ammerman and associates. The principles of dialogue and conscientization from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire are analyzed in relation to Jurgen Moltmann’s theology of play to develop an exploratory practice in the clinical and seminary contexts. A pastoral theological analysis explores how the misfit wisdom of play contributes to care practices in theological education and ministry.

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CHAPTER 1

Say, Say, O Playmate. Come Out and Play with Me: The Invitation

The Problem

This dissertation seeks to respond, primarily from within the context of Protestant Christianity, to the problem of pressured conformity in theological education. Especially in light of difficulty attracting competent persons to the ministry, there needs to be a balance between conformity and idiosyncrasy, between adherence to standards as well as space for individuality. Emphasis toward either extreme poses its own set of issues. Conformity, based on a mechanical worldview, envisions the benefit of reproduction of a standard model, but lacks space for originality. In contrast, unique expression may be interesting, curious and lively on its own, but lacks endurance and accountability without appropriate support structures. The development of creative religious leadership stands within the tension of conformity, on the one side, and idiosyncrasy, on the other. The ability to navigate this tension is a dilemma for religious persons and communities. Beneath the surface of the conversation reverberates the question of how best to foster vibrancy in ministry.

In the movement toward conformity, religious personnel and others overlook, or worse yet, try to get rid of, misfits—persons, qualities, and experiences—that do not adhere to standard preconceptions. For example, if the goal is to develop large congregations, then communities that do not continue to grow, even modestly, are considered failures. We deny the value of marginality, the phenomenon of creative negotiation between worlds of experience. Humans tend to manipulate, and re-form that which appears different in our midst. We resist misfitness pervasively—personally, socially, and institutionally. Substantial and valuable reasons may also warrant resistance

to that which is different. Among those reasons are the need for persons and institutions to maintain accountability and to ensure the safety of those who may be harmed or injured by those who claim a position of privilege because of their difference.

Yet, the need for creativity in spiritual leadership is a beckoning challenge at the dawn of this new century. Every age must wrestle with what it means to be a pastor and how best to prepare persons to meet the demands of congregation and culture. In this era, among those demands is the ability to envision new possibilities for forming ministers against the backdrop of heightened consciousness related to issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of the increased complexity related to, and inequities of power in, modern life.

There are two marginalities of importance in the problem of pressured conformity in theological education. One study¹ finds that the *marginality of organized religion* itself in relation to contemporary culture is the main deterrent to attracting and forming persons for religious leadership.

The marginal status of organized religion is very likely the basic cause of the difficulty attracting leaders for religious organizations. People of ability, especially the young, seek social roles that position them to make a substantial difference. The internal weakness of many religious organizations and their lack of influence in the wider society limit the amount of impact their leaders can expect to have.²

¹ The major weakness of the study, in my view, is its comparison between theological students and students in law and medicine (because statistics were available for these other two cohorts). The quality of students in theological schools might be better matched against their respective cohorts in professional schools of education, social work, and nursing. These fields are also currently having difficulty attracting and retaining persons of excellence. A comparison between theological students and those preparing for work as teachers, social workers, and nurses is a better match in terms of pay scales and social status. The problems facing religious institutions, while unique in certain regards, are simultaneously related to these other professions. Barbara G. Wheeler, "Fit for Ministry?" *Christian Century*, April 22, 2001, 16-23.

² Wheeler, "Fit for Ministry?" 23.

While recognizing that institutional religion's protracted problem of social marginalization may have some effect on the kind of leaders that communities are able to attract, I also contend that the problem of finding and forming leaders for ministry may not simply be a factor of organized religion's marginality within the wider culture. More particularly, the perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs *within* organized religious structures contribute as well to the *marginalization of members and potential leaders* relative to the community's own culture. Marginalized persons and those with marginalized qualities who are called to ministry bring unique personal gifts and talents for negotiating personal experience of marginality that may be, in turn, valuable characteristics for marginalized religious organizations. One "internal weakness" of institutional religion is that communities and institutions may stifle creativity in their very midst, and thereby contribute to a deadening form of marginality for persons who would otherwise serve as excellent leaders. It is all the more ironic when so-called marginal persons are often pushed to the side or excluded from the religious communities and organizations that themselves are marginalized within the larger culture. Organized religion's marginality, or positioning at the "edge of culture," affords religious communities and its members an opportunity to reflect intentionally and critically on *internal* questions of purpose and mission.

Furthermore, these challenges to Protestant denominations, in particular, and Christianity, in general, are situated within a larger context. Consider what Heidi Hadsell, theological educator and former director of the Bossey Institute of the World Council of Churches, suggests are challenges to Christianity in the twenty-first century.³

³ Heidi Hadsell, "Beyond Boundaries: The Changing Face of Christianity," public lecture delivered at the Claremont School of Theology, 20 March 2001.

First, the challenge of plurality becomes dominant in this century. In Hadsell's view, in order for Christian churches to embody more fully what it means to be the church, Christianity needs to continue to grow in its ability to be a "religion of and for 'the other,' when 'the other' is defined as women, nature, other religions, and the poor."⁴ From Hadsell's perspective, plurality challenges Christian persons and communities to honor and respect *the other as other*.

Second, in the midst of increasing plurality, Hadsell acknowledges there are also forces at work within some Christian communities to "bracket out" viewpoints in "an attempt to strengthen identity."⁵ The tendency is to disregard the other by 'bracketing out' difference, to dismiss or ignore difference in its various manifestations, such as differing or dissenting opinions, and human experiences which run contrary to the dominant paradigm, or which may not be easily categorized. While it is easier to embrace plurality and difference "inside" such brackets, this closure of human voices and experiences leads to a partial sense of community.

Third, Hadsell notes that the demographic changes in global Christianity represent institutional challenges for all Christians.⁶ For example, mainline Protestants and Orthodox Christians have been dialogue partners in the World Council of Churches for decades. According to Hadsell, as a result of the current internal challenges each community now faces—such as declining memberships, theological tensions among members, and shrinking budgets—constituents are retreating from the ecumenical conversation in an effort to avoid alienating members. In short, Hadsell observes that in

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

an era of increased globalization, there is a movement to define more narrowly particular identities and religious beliefs. Mainline denominations, she asserts, and I lament, are becoming increasingly anti-ecumenical, and anti-change.

This dissertation speaks to these challenges. The challenge of living in the context of increased plurality—and the concomitant need to honor and respect the other—requires continual spiritual practice because of the on-going commitment necessary to engage that challenge. Finding ways to live and minister in the midst of a creatively diverse world needs to become a way of life—a habit of mind and heart—for persons and communities in order to make room for the voices and concerns of all. The labors of many persons and disciplines are needed for this important task. Misfit persons and misfit experiences are often among those that are “bracketed out.” To my mind as a pastoral theologian and educator, it makes no sense to talk about educating the “model seminarian” for the work of ministry, because the needs of the churches are so diverse. Rather, contemporary institutional challenges facing religious communities represent an opportunity to reflect upon creative ways of structuring and maintaining our life together.

Thesis

Through the paradigm of play exercised in the context of Protestant Christian theological education—falling, getting up, trying new actions, experiencing delight, and expressing themselves—misfit ministers have opportunity to hone the values of their marginality, contain the potential misuse of their misfitness, and thereby contribute ethically to excellence in ministry. Throughout the dissertation, the argument holds that there are different dimensions of misfitness: experiences, qualities, and persons.

Consider the following excerpts from three noted scholars in theological education. James Dittes writes:

It remains here to acknowledge, indeed to claim, even to celebrate this preoccupation with the persistent and painful mis-fitness of ministry and to make very clear that this preoccupation is intended as a theological affirmation, a statement of faith. . . of how ministry is intended to be, *a chronic misfit*, comfortable resident of neither heaven or earth because committed—like the persistent God who calls—to reconcile these irreconcilable domains (emphasis mine).⁷

Letty Russell writes:

Many persons experience their own marginality in an institution or a social setting: persons and groups that are old or young, sick or poor, nonwhite, nonordained, female, or gay, just to name a few. Yet those who are responding to God's call to journey toward freedom will find that strength for partnership grows when we *celebrate marginality*. *God has identified with the misfits of the world* and encourages us to become marginal to structures that operate by standards of domination, injustice, and competition (emphasis mine).⁸

Glenn Asquith reflects on the experience of Anton Boisen and Wayne Oates, two ministers and formative figures considered “creative mavericks” of the twentieth century Protestant pastoral care movement in the United States. Boisen and Oates were creative mavericks in the sense that while they argued for the benefit of clinical learning for theological students, they themselves were considered unqualified and unfit for supervision by the accrediting organization of the time.⁹ Glenn Asquith does not focus on Protestant theological education in general, but writes more particularly about Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE):

⁷ James Dittes, *Re-Calling Ministry* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 182.

⁸ Letty M. Russell, *Growth in Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 159.

⁹ The organization, known as the Council for Clinical Training, was in existence for the years 1930 to 1967. In 1967, the Council merged with the Institute of Pastoral Care, the Association of Clinical Pastoral Educators, and the Department of Institutional Chaplaincy and Clinical Pastoral Education of the Lutheran Council in the United States in order to found the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc.

[T]rue clinical learning, as with meaningful religion, takes place on the edge of creative awareness. . . . [T]hose who may be regarded as “misfits” are often in the midst of significant growth and socially important insight. The early leaders of CPE were creative mavericks who were dissatisfied with the status quo. . . . CPE cannot afford to lose the contemporary leadership of such persons, lest it become “at ease in Zion” and lose its place on the cutting edge of both pastoral care and theological education (emphasis mine).¹⁰

Because of the importance of creativity and vitality in ministry, this dissertation makes explicit theoretical underpinnings that support the development of what I call “healthy misfits” in ministry. Especially in light of the tendency to disregard difference, particular attention needs to be given to misfits—marginal persons and marginalized qualities—because of their inherent value, and inevitable presence, in ministry. How do persons, communities, and institutions that identify themselves as “on the margins” live into their marginality, and by so doing, discover their vocation and contribute to new possibilities for ministry?

Play is a means of cooperative and collaborative engagement within the self and between self and others that seeks to heighten enjoyment of life experience through the incorporation of the innovative within structured patterns of behavior. Play allows for making mistakes in attempts to move beyond the conventional in pursuit of the novel.¹¹ I examine play as a means to interpret and sustain the critically examined experience of healthy misfits so to nurture their dynamism. As a master metaphor, play is sufficiently multi-faceted to elucidate complex and ambiguous experience.¹² Throughout the dissertation, I explore many ways that misfits play and express themselves differently

¹⁰ Glenn H. Asquith, Jr., ed., *Vision from a Little Known Country* (Decatur, Ga.: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1992), 233.

¹¹ My own working definition of play builds on the hypothesis that the phenomenon cannot be completely captured in words. See also Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

¹² See Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

from those who adhere to conventional practices, and therefore, may contribute to creative pastoral leadership.

An Ethic for Play

Given the many problems that arise in ministry, play cannot be considered a panacea for all issues.¹³ Play can contribute to health and healing, for persons and for communities, to the degree that it is grounded in the professional and ethical principles all seminarians and religious leaders need to learn, develop, and be held accountable. That is, play is not a rationale to “relax standards.” Excellence in ministry, as with other professions, requires that our conduct meet the demanding criteria set forth by accrediting organizations and church denominations. An alternative way to emphasize this point is this: an ethical engagement with play helps to form religious personnel for the rigors of responsible and creative leadership.

An ethic frames, shapes, and contains play so that it may contribute to generativity in human lives and communities, and limits the possibility for play’s misuse by misfits and others. This particular ethic of play is guided by the theological vision within the Judeo-Christian tradition that God calls all persons and communities to the fulfillment of abundant and fruitful life. Play can be an ethical means for learning in theological education and for practice in ministry in so far as it leads to the support and increase of resilience, faithfulness, commitment, and love between persons and within communities.

¹³ Among a number of publications on professional ethics and the ministry, I recommend the following: Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics: Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988); and Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care: A Guide for Pastors, Chaplains, and Spiritual Directors* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

The *principled and ethical use of play in theological education* adheres to specified criteria. Criteria against which potentially life-giving play may be held accountable follow. Ethical play creates a defined physical and attitudinal space that honors complexity and diversity. Ethical play allows for creative difference between persons, and fosters an open perspective to experience of one's self and others. Ethical play allows for the expression of new behavior patterns that respect the concerns of tradition and professional standards. Ethical play supports the experience and awareness of deeply felt emotion that may be appropriately expressed depending on contextual circumstances. The ethic is operationalized in theological education contexts in the following ways: clearly articulated in written guidelines, modeled by instructors, and practiced by students.

Why "Play"? My Investment in the Topic

A dissertation is, in no small measure, a working-through and claiming of one's own story. A friend has frequently chided me about "writing my memoirs." Jung Young Lee, a Korean-American theologian, illuminates the purpose of personal narrative in theological writing: "Theology is autobiographical, but is it not autobiography."¹⁴ By this, Lee suggests that the doing of theology is not simply recounting the facts of one's life, but rather emphasizes the story of one's life of faith as a critical resource for the writing of theology. For a long time, I struggled with including my own faith experience in this writing. Then I realized that not including it was *not* an option.

¹⁴ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 7.

My Enchantment with Misfits and Play

My enchantment for the dissertation topic of misfits and play began quite serendipitously. One morning in August 2000, while driving along southern California's 210 Freeway, which runs parallel to the majestic San Gabriel mountains I, like Mary, felt as if an angel spoke to me, and I needed time to ponder the significance of this message for my life. The magnitude of this felt-presence I could not deny. The phrase "Cultivating Religious Misfits" came immediately to mind as a topic for this project. The means by which misfits should be cultivated evolved over a longer period of time. However, I mention the initial and somewhat peculiar occurrence for the topic, in which affect played a predominant role, in order to highlight something about myself as a scholar, a minister, and the author of this work. I respond readily to flashes of insight and intuitive hunches—this process informs the way that I learn and do research. I value this aspect of who I am and the way that I work: scholarly research by means of inspiration. Another aspect of my work that I value is consistently seeing things through to completion. I value these aspects of my personhood—responsive to my intuition and responsible for fulfillment of obligations and commitment to others—because together they contribute to my desire to engage in ethical and creative play in ministry, the kind of play in which I invite others to participate.

I realized that the topic had a history, even if it was not delineated as such. Prophets, disciples, nomadic people wandering in the desert, a baby born in a manger bed—all these and more are misfits, God's cast of characters, a motley crew. The Protestant reformers, such as Martin Luther, were misfits in the sense that they agitated for change. Misfits are compelling figures precisely because they come in so many

shapes and sizes. Moreover, my experience in ministry has been quite diverse, including many “misfit” experiences that have helped to shape and to form my own pastoral identity. Other persons who heed the call to ministry in this age, I suspect, may have their own misfit experiences.

The will and wisdom to “step out on a limb” on behalf of the topic of play and misfits is a form of risk-taking. This risk, or what Page Smith calls “the demonstration of courage,” is necessary for strengthening of relationship between teachers and students, and as I argue, between pastors and those with whom they minister.¹⁵ Every risk contains the possibility of success and failure. From my pastoral theological perspective, we cannot foster creative ministers without educators who themselves are willing to demonstrate courage as well as conviction in their vocations. Several experiences from my own graduate theological education have fueled my passion for taking risks and finding ways to navigate between conformity and idiosyncrasy.

The first story illustrates how one of my mentors supported my emerging creativity. One semester, I designed an independent study course on “InterCultural Death and Dying.” I began this study with an intense interest in the subject matter, sustained in part by experience as a chaplain in a Hospice agency. I wanted to read widely in the published literature, but beyond that—in spite of the articulated goals I had established in the beginning—I was not quite sure what else I wanted to learn in the course. This “not knowing” allowed for an openness to learning during the semester that I could not have anticipated in advance. Given the prevailing requirements for writing in doctoral seminars, I planned to write a 25-page paper at the end of the semester. I was not excited

¹⁵ Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit* (New York: Viking, 1990), 205.

about it, though. Only after the guiding professor mentioned that I could fulfill the writing requirements in some other way did I recapture enthusiasm for the work. We agreed that I would write a critical essay on the most important books I had read; an annotated bibliography on a wider selection of texts; and I would design a course on Intercultural Care Practices on Death and Dying. The assignment to design a course that I would teach sparked my enthusiasm and imagination. I moved into this work with abandon: I evaluated the texts I was reading to determine whether they would be suitable for teaching Master's level students preparing for ministry; I continued my search for, and reading of, articles and books; I presented ideas to the Hospice team at the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) where I was working at the time; I talked with friends and family about the task I was working on; and I sketched topics to be considered in the course along with course goals, objectives, and requirements.

Interestingly, I felt like an impostor while engaged in this work. It was absorbing and satisfying, and at times, challenging and frustrating as well. All the while, I continued to think that the "real" work of graduate education was in the precise and scholarly preparation of papers and articles—and eventually books—for dissemination to a wider audience. I assumed that I was "only playing" with the design of a course and what I, as well as a future class, could learn from it. Yet it is precisely in this misfit experience—in this venture away from the prevailing conformity and prescription of graduate education—that I learned something new. I learned of the challenges of deciding what material to include as well as exclude from a syllabus; I learned the value of stating clearly the purpose and learning to be covered in each seminar; I struggled with the course requirements for writing and critical evaluation.

Another illustration points out the personal pain that may come from expressing one's creativity to ministry. Several years ago, after I formally began the supervisory certification process with the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), I was offering support to a person who had just been denied her candidacy request for the second time. I suggested how I would have responded to the conversation in the committee. To my comments, she eventually said, "That is why you will get through and I won't." I felt the pain in her response. And she was right: I did assume I would "get through." When the time came for my appearance before the certification committee, I approached the meeting as a collegial conversation. The actual experience proved to be different than I had expected. After I was denied my own request for candidacy the second time, I found myself in community with my colleague, along with a host of others: the community of misfits, the ones who, for various reasons, *did not perform at the standard expected by the organization or did not relate emotionally in expected ways*. The experience actually taught me more than I might have originally anticipated about myself as minister, and as a person. There are valuable lessons to be learned about being a misfit, and I received a good start from my family of origin.

Misfit Experience from My Family

My mother was a misfit in that she, unlike other members of her family who stayed close to the farm where she grew up in central Ohio, chose to move across the country to marry the man who was to become my father. As the following illustration highlights, my mother's misfitness also influenced a change in family practice even as respect for the tradition was maintained. I come from a long line of Presbyterians on my mother's side of the family. Her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were all Presbyterians. I, too, was eventually to become a Presbyterian. But my baptism did not

occur in the church sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Gilead, Ohio, according to family tradition. The weight of the Presbyterian heritage, though, was brought to bear when my grandparents came for a visit to California when I was six months old. At that time, a Presbyterian minister who had served the parish where my mother grew up, baptized me on a Sunday afternoon in a church manse surrounded by my parents and grandparents. The ritual itself, I am sure, received the stamp of approval from my grandparents. But, the ritual setting made for a misfit experience. We were nowhere near the hometown church in Mt. Gilead, Ohio. My mother's misfitness had influenced a misfit practice in the family, a practice that kept with *tradition* even in a rather *untraditional* way.

My father grew up as an only child to parents who married and divorced twice, in an era when the practice of divorce was socially scorned. In adulthood, I have been able to appreciate one significant way in which my father's misfitness, in cooperation with my mother's influence as well, has contributed deeply to my own development as a person. My father worked as an electronic technician for the federal government at McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, California. Numerous times throughout his career, he was offered—and refused to accept—positions in other locations of the country that would have required the entire family to move. Since my father's commitment to family ranked higher than his commitment to the job, we never moved. However, I do remember several occasions in which my parents, together, carefully weighed the possibilities. As a result of not moving, though, my father was never able fully to ascend his profession's ladder of success. If one looks at my father's career from the socially constructed view of success, then perhaps we can deem him a misfit. But his intention was not to be a

misfit: he simply held values, and set priorities, that put him in tension with the values of the corporate nature of the federal bureaucracy. My father's misfithood was a response to holding a different set of values.

So, my parents, in their own ways, have modeled for me how to be a healthy misfit—quietly, with resilience, faithfulness, abiding commitment, and love. The genuine work of the misfit, as they taught me, is toward the fulfillment of abundant and fruitful life in community with others.

My Religious Commitment and Intended Audience

This writing on misfits grows out of my passion for people, religious communities, and for God. I would describe myself as a man of hunger. I hunger for nourishing food and life-giving water, as a person of faith, and as one who provides leadership for God's people.

I still go to worship on Sunday mornings with some of the excitement and enthusiasm I carried as a child: it is the energy of wide-eyed expectancy. Sometimes, now, I feel disappointed in the experience. Still, I go because I feel pulled by the ritual that, though often overly reliant on the spoken word, holds vibrancy for me. These days I mostly treasure the moments of silence, the singing of hymns, and the glimpses into a different world in the reading of scripture.

This hunger for nourishing food and life-giving water also contributes to my desire to find means to continue to make possible the expression of vitality in the ministry. I am aware of some of the myriad ways that persons and systems can stifle creativity, reject new possibilities for action, thwart ideas that may generate new models and forms of ministry, hurl false accusations which threaten to undermine character and

reputations. In short, I understand that religious persons and institutions do not always serve God through pursuit of our highest, most common, good. Even while I recognize our personal and communal tendencies to squander our talents, I bring my commitment to the ushering in of new ideas and practices.

This dissertation reflects my dedication to sustaining a robust life of faith for persons and communities who are called to exercise leadership with vision and love. Since the work of pastoral leadership is laden with expectations—from the culture, parishioners, patients, and ministers themselves—we may become weary from all that we are called to do. Many of the expectations that we hold of pastoral leaders are often vague and unstated. My commitment is not to meet everyone's expectations, nor to educate ministers to do so. In fact, some may consider the direction of the proposal, or what Sallie McFague calls "thought experiment," in this dissertation to be considerably misguided because of the challenges that come with misfits and play.¹⁶ I do, however, intend to speak to those who are prepared to have their imaginations sparked and their spirits ignited.

My own location is within mainline Protestant theological education that focuses on the preparation of ministers. The theory and practices explored in the dissertation may be most applicable in settings where pastoral theology, care, and counseling are taught, which include clinical pastoral education training sites, theological seminaries, and local congregations. Most frequently, I use examples from my own experience in CPE and parish ministry. Throughout the text, I hold the assumption that the reader is situated so as to reflect on the theory explored and to implement the practices suggested.

¹⁶ I borrow this phrase from Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 20.

In addition to the focused audience, my hope is that others in the field of theological education may benefit from the insights developed here. To this end, I have noted areas in the text where possible fruitful connections can be made to areas of the theological education curriculum outside of pastoral theology, care, and counseling.

Definitions

My working definition of *play* is as follows: Play is a means of cooperative and collaborative engagement within self and between self and others that seeks to heighten enjoyment of life experience by making space for the innovative within structured patterns of behavior. Play allows for making mistakes in attempts to move beyond the conventional in pursuit of the novel.¹⁷ In using the term “play,” I point to meaningful human thought and behavior that has pattern to it without being completely prescribed or pre-determined. Play may take the form of frivolous behavior and affect. Play may also be a form of purposeful thought and behavior through which persons relate to others and the environment. As theoretical support for the writing that follows, I offer a number of other assumptions about play that guide the work.

The first assumption relates to the reflexive nature of play. Persons learn to play by playing. In so doing, they are able to discover, recover, see, and marvel at themselves and others in ways they might not be able to do otherwise. The reflexivity of play means that as we play we learn more about play itself. In order to teach and minister, we need a method that is lively—a method that allows for the creative expression of, and

¹⁷ My own working definition of play builds on the hypothesis that the phenomenon cannot be completely captured in words. For an extended discussion on this matter, see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

engagement with, ideas, problems, conflicts, and emotions, all the “stuff” of life.

Otherwise, we may end up teaching and ministering only from that which we already know, communicating ideas that are not applicable, and/or giving pastoral responses that do not meet the needs of others. In short, for ministry to be lively and engaging, pastoral educators need to foster creative practices for its support. Fostering play is one way to increase creative, lively, and engaging ministries.

The second assumption about play is that it “normalizes” our lives and our work. This might appear an odd claim given that I am also arguing that creativity emerges from marginal experience—from the place of not being typical. What I mean by the normalization of play is this: in play the veil of reality shifts so that what we may have initially considered to be impossible is now possible, at least in the realm of imagination. Perhaps only through imagination can we anticipate the steps necessary that may contribute to the transformation of the world. Play helps to reorganize our experience so that we see things differently from the way we might ordinarily see them.

The third assumption about play is that it opens the heart of our being. As one interviewee put it, ministry requires the formation of people with heart.¹⁸ Play can open the heart in surprising and unexpected ways, for people of all ages. An illustration of what I mean by play and laughter opening the heart connects with an illustration from my childhood. As a youngster, I remember experiences at the family dinner table when something unexpected would happen to make my younger sister or me giggle. These giggles were contagious; once started we had trouble stopping them. My parents were not usually amused by these sudden interruptions; they were often interpreted as

¹⁸ Personal communication with Rev. Howard Fuller, Ph.D., 12 May 2001.

distractions to eating our dinner. But this was not always the case. Sometimes, the contagious laughter would open their hearts to something life giving (laughter itself) but initially resisted. We might all erupt in laughter for no apparent reason. These are moments of shared communion. Play as a method in ministry is meant to evoke this kind of spirit—the spontaneous opening of the heart. This may happen in any number of ways: when a community of people gathers to work, learn, and labor on behalf of justice and peace.

I use the broader term *religious* compared to *Christian* in an effort to reflect the diversity of traditions present within a theological or divinity school. My own perspective and life experience is deeply influenced by the Reformed tradition of the Christian faith, although I do not assume this perspective in others. By *theological education*, I am referring to the formation of persons for ministry and pastoral leadership within the domains of the pastoral care and counseling curriculum of a theological school, the church, and the clinic. While I do not assume that these persons will necessarily receive ordination within their respective communions, I presume they are enrolled in M.Div. (and equivalent) degree programs.

By the term *misfit*, I refer to persons, qualities, and experiences that do not correspond to dominant cultural paradigms or perspectives. By *marginality*, I refer to the state living “in-beyond,” which means to live in two or more worlds and to be “free of the...different worlds in which persons exist, but to live in...them without being bound by...them.”¹⁹ I have intentionally chosen the term “misfit” rather than the term “marginality” or “margin” because misfit is a term in the English language that is used

¹⁹ I borrow this definition from Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*.

most frequently in a pejorative sense to refer to persons who are maladjusted to a particular environment or social milieu. Persons may stand, as it were, “in the margins” or live in a state of “marginality,” yet persons are not margins or marginality. They are misfits. This semantic distinction is important because the term “misfit” names an identity that needs to be reclaimed and celebrated.

I use the phrase “*healthy misfits*” to signify persons who claim and celebrate misfithood as an expression of authentic relational living. Healthy misfits are persons, relationships, and communities that abide by the principles outlined earlier in relation to an ethic of play. Furthermore, “*healthy misfits*” include those persons and communities that express *vitality* which describes “essential aliveness and life-affirmation. ...human agency that manifests in passion and capacity to endure,”²⁰ and devote themselves to *salutogenic*, meaning life-affirming and life-fostering, activity in the world. By “healthy misfits” I do not mean those who have simply adjusted or accommodated—that is, assimilated—to the demands of living and working in community with others. I mean, rather, those who are able to negotiate relationally the creative tension of being different and are capacitated to invite others to do the same.

Since power can be abused and relational boundaries violated,²¹ and especially in light of the possible ways in which play can be construed in support of pastoral misconduct, it is necessary to outline the distinguishing characteristics of what may be defined as “*unhealthy misfithood*.” The characteristics of unhealthy misfithood in

²⁰ I borrow this definition from Kathleen J. Greider, *Reckoning with Aggression* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 9.

²¹ For several particularly illuminating treatments of how power can be abused as well as monitored in the pastoral relationship, see the following. James Newton Poling, *The Abuse of Power* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); and Carrie Doehring, *Taking Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

relation to persons and communities include: violation of or intent to violate personal and professional boundaries of persons; inflexible or hostile use of play meant to intimidate, belittle, or diminish well-being; the claim of misfithood as a privilege in order to relinquish personal or corporate responsibility for ethically carrying out the essential tasks of ministry; the thwarting of creativity; and, purposefully inciting destructive levels of conflict. These characteristics indicate the presence of unhealthy misfithood.

Other relevant definitions include the following. *Psyche* is defined as "all those conscious and unconscious processes that enable or disable us to be persons in relation to ourselves, to others, to God."²² *Psychic* is that which relates to the psyche, as defined above. *Pastoral theology* is the term that refers to the branch of theology that gives primary attention to the care of persons and communities through the use of theoretical resources from theology, from personality and social sciences, and from persons themselves. *Practical theology* is the term that refers to the branch of theology that is concerned with theological and methodological matters related to the various aspects of ministerial practice, including, among others, homiletics, liturgics, church administration, and religious education.

Methodology

In this section, I describe two aspects related to the method of this dissertation: the analytical approach and the type of information examined. In regard to analytical method, this dissertation is a pastoral theological, and thus primarily philosophical, treatment of the subject matter: an examination of the value of educating ministers within

²² I borrow this definition from Ann Ulanov. See *Finding Space* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 8.

the paradigm of play for pastoral leadership. From this foundation, I generate implications for the practice of theological education and ministry.

The phrase “orchestrated engagement” describes my procedure for coordinating insights from various fields. This method takes as its starting point a commitment to, and appreciation of, interdisciplinary writing—a value I share with many practitioner scholars in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling because of the rigorous analysis required to care for living human persons, communities, and systems.²³ Interdisciplinary research and writing recognizes that no one field alone can sufficiently generate the insight and analysis necessary to address the complexity of human personhood and relationality. Scholarship that responsibly builds upon the knowledge of different fields can contribute to analysis that is less likely to be facile and more likely to be complex and rigorous since it is informed by, and held accountable to, a variety of experts. The term “orchestrated engagement” points to several concerns at the heart of this analytical method: (1) intentional collaboration; (2) listening to various sources; (3) eliciting insights; and (4) coordinating unity, harmony, and dissonance. The method itself mirrors the process of conducting a musical ensemble that, not incidentally, is a form of playing.

First, the method recognizes the scholarly significance of placing texts from different fields “in concert” with one another; this approach to the work is necessary given the complex nature of the task of pastoral leadership development. I use the term ‘intentional’ to signal purposeful action; ‘collaboration’ refers to the selective gathering

²³ See Valerie DeMarinis, *Critical Caring: A Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); and Larry Kent Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

together of the sources in order to foster benefit and expansion. Second, I listen attentively and critically to the texts, allowing them to “speak.” This stage of the method takes seriously the value of careful focus and soulful reflection as a posture appropriate to detect the tenor, tone, and volume of the texts. Third, I articulate insights among the various texts—first within their own context, and then in relation to one another. This represents a correlation aspect of the method that serves to intensify the interrelationships among the texts. Fourth, I coordinate the insights from the texts so as to form a “musical” ensemble. This level of analysis will include explicit focus on areas of unity, harmony, and dissonance.

The methodology for this project draws from various kinds of texts. Primary focus is given to literature from the following fields because of the theoretical perspective they lend to the illumination of misfithood and play: pastoral theology, care, and counseling; object relations and depth psychologies; leadership studies; spiritual direction; process and liberationist theologies; and, critical pedagogy.

Pastoral theology as a scholarly discipline has traditionally and distinctively been committed to the care practices of the church and brings a particular form of expertise to the task. This expertise is the critical reflection upon the interrelationship between theology and actual experience in order to construct and revise theories and practices that contribute to the care of human persons and communities. Therefore, this dissertation will be infused with insights of the “living human document” from two sources.²⁴ I will recount and analyze my decade of experience as an ordained minister in the Presbyterian

²⁴ The phrase, associated with Anton Boisen of the early clinical pastoral education movement in the United States, recognizes the centrality of the direct study of human experience. See Anton Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World* (Chicago: Willett, 1936); and *Out of the Depths* (New York: Harper, 1960).

Church (U.S.A.), serving in the capacities of pastoral educator, local parish pastor, hospice chaplain, and college chaplain. In order to hold the thesis accountable to a multiplicity of experience, I analyze data from thirty interviews I conducted with seminarians, retired ministers, administrators, ministers, judicatory staff, theological and education faculty, and religious practitioners both inside and outside the institutional church. These interviews occurred in a number of settings, both formal and informal, in which I invited persons to express their views on the topic of misfits in the ministry and on play in theological education and leadership. In response, I shared my reflections on the topic, and we engaged in further dialogue. These interviews were not formally recorded; I took notes during and after the sessions. Citations for particularly noteworthy responses in the interviews appear in the footnote text of the dissertation.

The Dissertation's Argument and Storyline

The dissertation makes an argument and also tells a story. Story telling is important as a means of human communication for its ability to convey values and meaning. First, I elaborate on the contours of the argument.

The places where we do not fit serve as opportunities for growth. I will argue for the need to examine respect, examine, and test, the value of misfit experience, in part, because of the beauty of the particularity of experience. As a pattern of interaction, play suggests that difficulties and challenges are not impassable to be negated, but complex nexuses of inter-relationships that need to be touched into, danced with, teased out. The formation of ministers within this framework is crucial for the ongoing health of persons and communities. In short, it is a way to activate a strength that already exists in our midst. I will argue that deep value and significance can arise from the recognition of

misfithood, thereby supporting religious leadership to speak with authority and conviction, as well as to live with emotional authenticity, about the counter-cultural message of the Christian gospel.

As an interpretive lens, play is a means to foster the places where we do not fit—with the intended purpose to support human flourishing. Examination at the margins of our institutional life provides clues to what needs to be addressed at the “center” of our concern—the vital need to support the development of new life in the church. The framework allows us to capture the significant activity and contribution of misfithood that otherwise might be lost. This argument makes the assumption that particular wisdom emerges from life as marginalized persons and as a marginalized institution.²⁵

Through play, persons not only image a different world, but also participate in making it a reality. This notion builds on the assumption that play is transformational activity. In the realm of play, persons and communities are released from the undue burdens that predetermine what successful ministry looks like, and are freed to assume new roles, identities, and purposes, all for the implicit goal of embodying life-giving possibilities for the future.²⁶ Misfit persons and communities are uniquely prepared to play because of the learned ability especially through play to negotiate differences. An underlying assumption in the argument is that the repetition or replication of what has been done previously is as much value for ministry in the future as the ability to generate and implement new vision.

By listening to, and valuing, all the misfits in our midst, theological educators model a process for ministers that ministers may, in turn, model for the persons they

²⁵ See Lee, *Marginality*.

²⁶ See Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

serve. Play offers a needed alternative to the model of human activity as production.²⁷

Play may contribute to the development of faithful living by helping to evoke unexpressed potential—spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually—within persons and communities. In play, we may awaken to the fundamental joy in our existence as beloved of God and enter more fully into the experience of life that is our birthright. We are able to relax, lighten up, and express humor, all of which are central to the development of pastoral leadership from the margins.

Second, my intention in the following pages is also to tell a story of misfits in ministry since story telling is one means by which we convey value and meaning. As with all individual stories, it is tempered with my own biases, inclinations, and assumptions. It is also a story of struggle because our stories are difficult to tell well. The story needs to be told, in spite of, and even because of, its partiality and the hopes and intentions for fullness of life and humanity that I bring to the work. Neither the story of misfits, nor the story of how play contributes to creativity offers the full story.

Every story has a tone. A tragedy, for example, is a story—a drama usually—that includes elements in the plot that lead to a primarily unfortunate or unhappy ending. A comedy is a story that contains light-hearted and humorous elements with an overall happy ending. It should be noted that all complex stories, in varying degrees, contain elements of each type of story. This dissertation combines elements of a tragedy and elements of a comedy. It is more accurately described as a tragicomedy.

²⁷ See James D. Whitehead, "The Practical Play of Theology," in *Formation and Reflection*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 36-54.

The notion of misfithood or marginality suggests difference and dissonance. So what does it feel like to be different? All who have found themselves feeling different know that the experience can be very disorienting. Sometimes, though, feeling different can be exhilarating and exciting because people also like to be recognized for qualities and behaviors that make them stand out from others. It can be a privilege to be seen in this way. Often, as well, feeling different means feeling isolated and alone, unlike others, separate and unwanted. Feeling different can be accompanied with intense awareness to painful experiences of exclusion. The storyline of feeling different may lead to a tragic ending, and by this, I mean to suggest that persons and communities experience an overall sense of diminishment. Whether gradually or suddenly, persons may lose a sense of heart, lose a sense of their inherent beauty and goodness. This experience of diminishment, of feeling less than adequate, is an indirect loss for all of us. I argue that this is a form of death.

Simultaneously, this storyline contains elements of a comedy—suggested in no small part by the thesis of play—which develops a new perspective in the midst of situations in which there is disjuncture in events, personalities, circumstances, or language domains. Harvey Cox notes the distinction between comedy and tragedy in the following way: “In tragedy we weep and are purged. In comedy we laugh and hope.”²⁸ The storyline of misfits in ministry, then, is a tragicomedy in the sense that elements of both kinds of stories are present, mutually complementing and transforming one another.

²⁸ Cox, *Feast of Fools*, 150.

Scope and Limitations, and Contribution

Scope and Limitations

My focus in this work is on the salugenic aspects of fostering religious leadership. That is, attention is given to those components and processes that foster vitality and ethical relationality in the pastoral role. The dissertation does not attend to the pathogenic aspects of misfithood. Such an inquiry would require its own line of investigation, using psychiatric and psychological analytical tools, as well as social and cultural analysis necessary to investigate the construction of psychiatric illnesses. Such work would be a valuable avenue of exploration for a future project.

The cultivation of religious misfits also requires, at the very least, the support and solidarity of persons outside the contexts of theological education. Discernment of a call to ministry necessitates the cooperation, endorsement, and support of communities of persons. This dissertation does not explore those possibilities, although it assumes that they exist.

The thesis develops the theme of misfits in ministry, and allows for the possibility that some marginalized persons may need to leave the ministry for various reasons. However, an examination of the many reasons that distract the support of misfithood and longevity in ministry are not explored in this dissertation. An investigation in this regard would require locating persons who have left, conducting interviews, and then developing an analysis of the findings. Some possible questions include the following: how were you able to play or not play in your capacity as a religious leader? How did ministry make possible or limit the expression of your

creativity? Other fruitful questions could be explored, such as: in what ways did your experience in theological education serve you in your current work or retirement?

This dissertation focuses analysis on a set of persons and qualities for ministry. That is, misfit persons and communities are examined through the paradigm of play in order to show the value and creativity they bring to the church and its mission. The analysis does not attempt to develop an overall theory of, nor the problems of incorporating play within, theological education.

The study is limited to an exploration of theological education as it pertains to the context of the United States. I have not examined issues of marginality, and how they might be illuminated by the thesis of play, in other countries, although, there is reason to presume that related issues and questions are being raised in other contexts as well. The argument does, however, consider the value of intercultural immersion experiences and how they can serve the educational benefit for theological students in the United States.

As a theoretical experiment, this dissertation does not employ an empirical methodology. That is, it does not consider the value of play by operationalizing the principle to examine whether misfits do, under certain conditions, contribute to creativity in ministry. Research along these lines could be developed. For instance, a study could measure against a control group whether the inclusion of play days (described in Chapter 4) in a theological curriculum supports the development of creative students, capable of participating in play and providing the conditions necessary for others to play. Such an investigation requires quantitative analysis, and therefore, is clearly outside the scope of this dissertation.

Contribution

I am by no means the first person to explore marginality and play. However, this dissertation is different from other research in that it explores the interrelationality of these topics—the marginality of play and the play of marginalized persons and qualities. Focused attention on religious misfits brings heightened awareness to misfithood as a source of creativity and generativity. The use of play as a paradigmatic lens casts the purpose and function of theological education in a new light.

My research contributes most directly to the nascent literature in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling on the topic of play. The field offers rich possibilities for forming persons and communities for creative and life-giving expressions of Christian faith. This study contributes as well to literature in the fields of theological education, religious education, ministerial studies, and pastoral leadership development. A continued discussion of the dissertation's contribution is evidenced in relation to several bodies of literature that will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

The dissertation is developed in six chapters. A summary of the contents of each chapter follows.

Chapter 2, "Building a Fort in the Forest," reviews literature in the field of pastoral theology on the topic of play and closely associated themes. Here also is a review of interdisciplinary literature related to play; an analysis of this project in relation to the literature on theological education; and finally, an examination of literature relevant to the metaphors of ministry.

In Chapter 3, “Red Light, Green Light: Contributions to Vitality and Creativity in Psychic Life,” I consider the complexity involved in the psychic life of misfits through the theme of grief. Grief is examined because it includes a nexus of emotions, often considered antithetical to play, that can open our hearts to the possibility of play. The work of Daniel Goleman, a clinical psychologist turned journalist, supports the argument in this section. Goleman claims that skills such as leadership, organizing groups, and the development of social relationships call for “emotional intelligence,” a meta-ability which integrates mood and thought.²⁹ Goleman’s perspective helps build the case to integrate emotional life within a theological education structure. The chapter turns to an elaboration of the key principles of play by Donald W. Winnicott, a British object relations theorist and child psychiatrist, who provides the theoretical framework to illumine what occurs psychodynamically. Winnicott argues that the emergence of what he calls the True Self comes about through the dynamic interplay between self and environment.³⁰ Cultivation of healthy personhood comes about through the on-going negotiation between inner and outer worlds. The theory provides the lens through which to examine the development of self-hood, the nature of play space, and a means for negotiating transitions in our lives. Persons may encounter their true selves in the experience of play. This analysis places an emphasis on play as a primary form of creativity. A brief addendum from the work of Howard Gardner, an educational psychologist, supplements and extends the play theory of Winnicott.

²⁹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

³⁰ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

In Chapter 4, "Following the Leader as Creative Adventure," I build the argument that competent and creative leadership is grounded in a theological worldview that values play. I draw explicitly from Bernard Loomer, a process theologian, who argues that human life may be measured in terms of the developed capacity for soulfulness, which relies on a relational view of power. Gordon Kaufman, a systematic theologian, provides the image of God as Serendipitous Creativity. Effective leadership emerges from the unfolding awareness of the identity of those who exercise leadership, and from the ability to inspire, activate, or mobilize others in the life of faith. The chapter reviews pertinent literature on the topic of leadership. The chapter relies on Ronald Heifetz's leadership theory in which he argues that "adaptability"—the capacity to navigate through complex and ever-changing territory—is the definitive mark of excellent leadership in this era.³¹ Leadership as adaptive variability is examined in relation to one of the primary contexts of religious leadership—the congregation. The research of Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Arthur E. Farnsley II, sociologists in religion, examines various patterns of adaptation in congregations across the country.³² Through case studies, the authors demonstrate how survival depends on the ability to develop new strategies of action drawn from the cultural tools available. This work makes a strong case for the benefit of innovation, imagination, and flexibility, all of which are necessary for the complex task of forming religious leaders for service in these unsettled times. Finally, leadership as adaptive practice requires the development of leaders capacitated to foster creative ritual.

³¹ Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994).

³² Nancy Tatom Ammerman, with Arthur E. Farnsley et al., *Community and Congregation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997). This book is a report of a major research project conducted under the direction of the primary authors. Fifteen graduate students participated in the collection of data across the country.

The ritual theory of Victor Turner, a social anthropologist, provides the theoretical grounding to show how the practice of ritual fosters community. Various practices that inform the development of creative leadership are examined.

Chapter 5, “Ollie, Ollie, Oxen Free—Play as Emancipatory Education,” explores the contribution of play to the practice of an emancipatory theological education. The chapter examines a critical pedagogy that fosters the development of *habitus*, theological wisdom, through exploration. This form of pedagogy calls for cultural critique as well as thoroughgoing self-examination. The chapter builds on the critical notion that only as persons “discover themselves to be ‘hosts’ of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy.”³³

In particular, the Freirean notions of dialogue and conscientization are examined and described in relation to theological education in the clinical and seminary contexts. The thought of Jurgen Moltmann, who draws on critical theory, informs the analysis. A pedagogy of play grounded in a critical theology of play informs the development of misfit students and ministers for the liberating practice of ministry. Practices of play that contribute to emancipatory education are described, since the notion of misfit carries potency in pastoral education in so far as it leads persons and communities to contribute to life-giving practices. Finally, the limits of play as an educational practice are considered.

In Chapter 6, “Let’s Play Hide-and-Seek: Pastoral Theological Analysis,” the notion of the religious misfit is examined from my perspective as a pastoral theologian. Primary focus in this chapter is given to the care of misfits through the practice of play.

³³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 33.

Here I interweave the themes and theory we have explored throughout the dissertation to demonstrate how caring through play contributes to the fostering of healthy misfits for pastoral leadership. We examine how play contributes to the cultivation of what I call misfit wisdom. We consider the care of play and misfits within the context of pastoral care and counseling classrooms in the theological seminary and within clinical pastoral education. We also examine elements of caring for misfit communities and transitional spaces. Finally, we explore playful spiritual practices that care for misfits.

In Chapter 7, "Rounding Third Base: Summary, Reflections, and Research," I revisit the main themes we have covered in the dissertation, offer reflections on playful impasses and wanderings, and suggest possibilities for fruitful future research.

CHAPTER 2

Building a Tree Fort: A Review of Literature

The previous chapter introduced the problem of navigating between conformity and idiosyncrasy in Protestant theological education contexts that prepare persons for ministry, and proposed play as a partial solution to the dilemma. In this chapter, I examine literature relevant to the topic of play and theological education in order to locate my work in relation to other research, since scholars do not work alone, but rather in relationship to, and sometimes at the edges of, other bodies of literature.

A section of the chapter features interdisciplinary literature on play that has been cited in pastoral theology, care, and counseling literature. Included, as well, is a review of one piece of literature that, while not yet cited in the field, offers promising insights for future research. Since the literature in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling related explicitly to the topic of play is scant, I have expanded the search to include literature close to the topic in the field, such as imagination and ritual. Further, I have reviewed literature in the field of systematic theology that pertains to play. Since my work is also located close to the literature on theological education, I review several pieces of work that are pertinent in this regard. Within this section, I also discuss theological writing that addresses the theme of marginality. The chapter concludes with an analysis of literature related to the topic of metaphor since I am proposing that misfit is a compelling metaphor to name the experience of marginalized ministers.

The chapter adheres to the following framework: (1) Interdisciplinary Literature on Play; (2) A Review of Pastoral Theology, Care, and Counseling Literature which

includes systematic theology; (3) Literature on Theological Education, including an analysis of literature on marginality; and (4) Misfit as Metaphor.

Interdisciplinary Literature on Play

The following analysis of literature takes up the research of four scholars. The first theorist, D.W. Winnicott, receives only brief mention in this context because his work is considered in much more detail in Chapter 3. Two other scholars, Johan Huizinga and Hans-Georg Gadamer, are often cited in the scant literature related to play in pastoral ministry. The fourth scholar, Brian Sutton-Smith, has written extensively on the subject of play, and it is his work that has most challenged my own thinking. This review of literature, outside of my field, illumines and nuances the complexity of the term play as it is used throughout this dissertation.

D.W. Winnicott argues that human experience is neither completely internal nor external. Winnicott identifies this “space” as the intermediate area or the third (3rd) area of experience.¹ In short, Winnicott says that the intermediate area is the “space where we live.”² By this he implies that human experience is on-going relational development between our inner and outer worlds, and “plays itself out” in the creation of such aspects as art, culture, ritual, music, and religious meaning. In the intermediate area, human persons relationally negotiate their symbolic world. When working (playing) with symbols, Winnicott contends, it is essential for human growth and development that the power inherent in symbols or images not be collapsed through undue explanation. Such theory can inform the practice of play in theological education as instructors teach

¹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 104.

students critical analysis of religious symbols, as well as help students develop the care-filled capacity to interpret these same symbols and images in light of the complex variety of subjective human experience.

Johan Huizinga, a social anthropologist, has contributed an important text on the subject of play that has influenced countless scholars in many fields.³ Huizinga investigates play as it manifests as a cultural phenomenon. Huizinga suggests four distinct characteristics of play: it is voluntary activity, which means that persons should never be forced to participate, and that play always maintains an aspect of freedom;⁴ it is a move outside of real life into a realm and "disposition all its own," which means that play is an "interlude" to daily living;⁵ it requires its own separate, defined territory, which means that play occurs in those spaces and settings that are clearly marked out for this activity;⁶ and finally, it creates its own order, which means that play operates by a structured reality governed by its own internally consistent rules.⁷ For Huizinga, play is an activity that we engage in for our enjoyment, or for our own pleasure. In Huizinga's view, play is "superfluous activity" and therefore not necessary for our existence.⁸ Huizinga is largely concerned with the various ways that the play-form (by which he means the four distinct characteristics of play) manifests in culture.⁹ The theory is less useful for describing the interpersonal and intrapsychic dimensions of play. Further,

³ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ Huizinga does not offer a precise definition of play, although he acknowledges that play and culture are inextricably linked. Huizinga argues that in this "twin union of play and union, play is primary." In short, he contends that what comes to be described as "culture" is a cumulative response to the way that human societies play. *Ibid.*, 46.

Huizinga's perspective of play as superfluous activity runs counter to my own view.

Huizinga's theory informs the nature of highly stylized forms of play that we encounter in religious ritual.

Hans-Georg Gadamer approaches the problem of play from a philosophical perspective.¹⁰ Gadamer is concerned with describing how "play" takes place between a subject and object, which can be either animate or inanimate. Gadamer's perspective seeks to articulate what happens (what is playing), for instance, when a person views an object of art. In this experience, Gadamer contends that the "to and fro movement" of play, not the achievement of a goal, is of importance.¹¹ Gadamer argues that play occurs without effort so that playing is like being itself in that it spontaneously arises from the experience of living beings.¹² He writes, "The being of all play is always self-realization, sheer fulfillment, *energia* which has its *telos* within itself."¹³ The purpose of play, as Gadamer asserts, is not merely in solving a task *per se*, but also its ability to shape the movement of the game. For the purpose of this dissertation, Gadamer's phrase "to-and-fro movement," is a useful phenomenological description to articulate what occurs between persons, and within communities, in the experience of play.

The theory of psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith is particularly noteworthy because Sutton-Smith examines the subject of play across a wide variety of fields and disciplines to demonstrate how the phenomenon takes on a complex and ambiguous set of

¹⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 101-34.

¹¹ Ibid., 103.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 113.

meanings.¹⁴ Sutton-Smith develops a perspective on play that he names “adaptive variability.”¹⁵ Adaptive variability refers to play’s capacity to activate latent potential, to provide the energy that affects the ability to engage other life activities, and to increase the ability to respond to change.

According to Sutton-Smith, play as adaptive variability is characterized by its quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility.¹⁶ Quirkiness broadly characterizes such phenomena as the seemingly chaotic and unpredictable movements of animals at play, to the nonsense of children at play, to the nature of sports and games of contest. Redundancy refers to the useful function of repetition involved in play. Redundancy or reproduction produces a kind of “extra capacity” for whatever uses the person or community deems them necessary. Flexibility is the foundational principle that generates both quirky variability and multiple redundancy. In play, flexibility is a necessary component both for learning patterns of behavior and for repeating them. Moreover, Sutton-Smith, building on the work of biologist Richard Lewontin, offers six psychological postulations in regard to the function of play.¹⁷ First, in play human beings may “actualize” what are previously only “potential brain and behavior connections.”¹⁸ Play stimulates our unrealized potential. Second, in play we are optimistic, self-aware, and responsive.¹⁹ Third, play enhances the variability of cultural expression in human society.²⁰ Fourth, skills acquired or exercised in play may be transportable to other areas

¹⁴ Sutton-Smith, *Ambiguity of Play*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

of life: this is the “trickle down” element of play.²¹ Fifth, play provides the necessary conditions for that which would otherwise remain nascent in human life.²² Finally, the variability of play reinforces our capacity to live with greater degree of flexibility and adaptation in our daily living.

Sutton-Smith’s theory of play is particularly illuminative, in my view, because it demonstrates that play has manifold purposes. Play can provide enjoyment, stimulate growth, re-awaken the wonder of childhood in the life of the adult. Furthermore, play is a capacity inextricably linked to our ability to survive and to thrive as a species.

A Review of Pastoral Theology, Care, and Counseling Literature on Play

In this section we review literature in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling on the topic of play. The analysis is developed according to the following themes: play in pastoral theological reflection, theory related to play and playfulness, play practices, professional projects on play, systematic theologians and religious education and play. Literature on imagination and ritual is also explored because of the close relation to play. Throughout, attention is given to ways in which the thesis explored in this dissertation extends, supports, and critiques previous research on play and closely related topics.

Play in Pastoral Theological Reflection and Analysis

James Whitehead first called for play as a method for doing practical theology.²³ Whitehead employs the psychological work of Erik Erikson as a resource to suggest that a method of play in practical theology follows the play of children: they take the leap of

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ James D. Whitehead, “Practical Play of Theology.”

delight for its own sake, they test the leeway, and they fall back down to earth.²⁴ Play as theological reflection includes our leaping, testing, and falling as we use the sources of Christian tradition, cultural information, and personal experience in order to experience the liveliness of faith.²⁵ My research builds on Whitehead in one significant way: I, too, argue for a method of play that contributes to the development of faithful and creative persons. However, I draw from different resources in my argument and I focus particularly on play within the context of theological education.

Andrew Lester calls pastors to enter into play as a method for ministering with children in crisis. Play, the author suggests, is a natural activity for children and is, therefore, an important means by which pastors can establish meaningful relationships and develop insights and understandings for children who are in pain, trouble, or distress.²⁶ The author offers practical suggestions for games to play that facilitate pastoral conversation with children. The strength of this writing, and its valuable contribution to the field of pastoral care, is the focused attention given to the care of children, an often-neglected population within the congregation. My work is quite distinct from Lester's in that I focus on play in adulthood.

Howard Clinebell develops a model that integrates the well being of persons and communities with the well being of the earth. The author develops psychological, spiritual, and educational methods that recognize and embrace the intersection between the healing of the earth and human healing.²⁷ Most relevant to the notion of play is

²⁴ Ibid., 47.

²⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁶ Andrew Lester, *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

²⁷ Howard Clinebell, *Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth* (New York: Haworth Press, 1996).

Clinebell's assertion that human creativity emerges as we relate intimately with the earth and nature. Clinebell's analysis of creation's role in human health and well-being is a distinct contribution to the field of pastoral care. My work, like Clinebell's, takes seriously the need to create contexts that allow for human flourishing. Unlike Clinebell, however, I do not explicitly take into consideration how the natural environment can be a source for play and healing. In another text, Clinebell has specifically addressed the need for play and creativity in care related to self, others, and the environment. Clinebell suggests that play is one of the significant dimensions of human life that needs to be cultivated in order to lead a fulfilled life.²⁸ Clinebell offers practical guidelines for assessing one's level of playfulness and also offers suggestions for ways to include play in the course of daily life such as setting aside time for play each day, and regular journal writing.²⁹ The concrete suggestions Clinebell makes for attending to play represent strengths of this work. Throughout my analysis of playful misfits in theological education, I also suggest practices, based upon theory being explored, that can be developed within theological education.

Joan E. Hemenway has examined the historical and practical role of process groups within CPE. The author traces the educational purpose of CPE small group learning during the course of the twentieth century, and notes the ways in which contemporary psychological theories, most notably psychoanalytic and humanistic psychology, influenced the practice of group supervision. Hemenway offers her own constructive proposal for the "transformative play" of process groups, based on the

²⁸ Howard Clinebell, *Well Being: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1992).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-77.

psychological theory of Wilfred Bion and D.W. Winnicott, as well as the play theory of Johan Huizinga.³⁰ My work is related to Hemenway's in that I, too, include extensive analysis and examples of learning within the context of CPE. Unlike Hemenway's work, however, my research does not focus exclusively on the process dynamics within the CPE groups themselves. My analysis also explores the value of playful leadership practices outside the context of the formal setting of learning.

Theory Related to Play and Playfulness

Several scholars in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling have developed theory based on play or the necessity of playfulness. Charles V. Gerkin has articulated a hermeneutical approach to pastoral counseling in which he draws largely from the theory of Hans Gadamer.³¹ Gerkin argues that healing occurs in the context of pastoral counseling between the "play and interplay that takes place between two language horizons of understanding in accordance with the Christian myth."³² Gerkin suggests that change occurs in the pastoral encounter because of relational dynamics within as well as beyond what each participant brings to the relationship. My research considers the value that play can contribute to the professional formation of persons who engage in pastoral counseling, but the work does not focus primarily on method of interpretation within the defined context of pastoral counseling. Donald Capps, a pastoral theologian, analyzes the usefulness of the psychotherapeutic method of reframing—the examination of problems from a new perspective—in contexts of pastoral care. Capps argues that the success of the method partially relies on a practitioner's ability for

³⁰ Joan E. Hemenway, *Inside the Circle* (Atlanta: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1996), 199-222.

³¹ Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

³² *Ibid.*, 47.

playfulness, lightness of touch, and the release of laughter.³³ The method of reframing is not itself play, but seems to work best with the guidance of professionals who themselves are capacitated to play. My research, like Capps', advocates a method that can be useful in helping parish ministers increase their ability to offer care with persons and communities.

My own thoughts on play as it relates to pastoral theological education were stimulated early on by the inspirational lecturing and writing of Jerome Berryman³⁴ who develops practical theological reflection on the nature of religious education for children.³⁵ Berryman's method of religious education assists adults in their ministry with children. His analysis includes theoretical and practical suggestions for what he calls "teaching through the spoken lesson," ways to engage children through telling, listening, and writing.³⁶ Berryman also gives attention to what he calls "teaching the unspoken lesson," facilitating the kind of space, time, and disposition necessary to communicate effectively with children.³⁷ My research, which has implications for the ways that misfit ministers relate with children, primarily addresses play's possible contribution to the education and care of adults.

One closely related piece of literature to play is Larry Kent Graham's theoretical analysis of creativity as a contributing factor in the care of persons and systems. Graham has articulated the interrelationship between social and cultural realities and the care of

³³ Donald Capps, *Reframing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 180.

³⁴ Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995).

³⁵ An entire body of literature develops the theme of play as it relates to children and worship. One noteworthy text along this vein is Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed. *The Sacred Play of Children* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983). The volume addresses, among other issues, the preparation of liturgy appropriate for children, the administration of the sacrament of anointing, and pastoral care with sick children.

³⁶ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 73ff.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 70-109.

human persons. Graham develops a “psychosystemic” approach to pastoral theology, a term that references “the reciprocal interplay between the psyche of individuals and the social, cultural, and natural orders.”³⁸ Graham illustrates the meaning of this dynamic interplay between persons and their environment through an analysis of Pablo Picasso’s *Three Musicians*, which depicts three men sitting together playing their musical instruments.³⁹ The figures are fragmented and distorted; it is in the midst of this environment that the men play their music. Graham highlights the point that “the broken, fragmented, and distorted environment is necessary for the musicians to have a central place in the picture.”⁴⁰ Of particular importance to my project is this: one of Graham’s goals is to develop an analysis that fosters the movement from vitiated creativity to vital creativity. Vitiating creativity refers to the manifold ways in which the creative human impulse is discounted, paralyzed or forced underground, whereas vital creativity affirms the inclination toward novel expressions.⁴¹ Misfits know the power of vitiated creativity because they have often been the victims of it.

Play Practices

A number of theorists and practitioners in the field of pastoral theology have examined specific methods of play. Pamela Couture suggests that role play is an effective means to teach students important skills in pastoral caregiving.⁴² Couture contends that role playing, as a form of “ritualized playing,” allows instructors to create a “learning environment that allows students to ‘think on their feet’” and thereby increase

³⁸ Graham, 13.

³⁹ A copy of this artistic work appears on the cover of the book. Graham describes the cover art in the body of the text. Ibid., 14-16.

⁴⁰ Graham, 15.

⁴¹ Ibid., 102.

⁴² Pamela Couture, “Ritualized Play: Using Role Play to Teach Pastoral Care and Counseling,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 2 (June 1999): 96-102.

their facility in offering pastoral care.⁴³ Couture argues that role playing helps students to exercise “practical reason,” the ability to bring intellectual knowledge to the concerns and issues that pastors and caregivers face daily in their ministries.⁴⁴ The author describes her own experience of teaching role-play in the pastoral care classroom. She argues that students can benefit from participating in “spiritual practices” that help to “ground their practice” as professionals who need to integrate knowledge of human personality with knowledge of God in order to respond appropriately to persons in the moment.⁴⁵ I, too, focus on the development of practices of play within pastoral theology, care, and counseling contexts that can help seminarians hone their capacity to initiate creative pastoral caregiving, and hopefully to generate faithful and ethical responses to the needs of parishioners and others.

Couture also argues for conducting research that examines the intersection between the field of pastoral theology and aesthetics. Such research can help to raise critical questions and to propose informed and alternative forms of pastoral care practice that may be able to address the religious concerns and experience of women.⁴⁶ The examination of aesthetic experience as it informs pastoral theology is necessary, in part, because of the therapeutic nature of non-rational activities such dance, drama, and music. Couture argues for the development of a “feminist pastoral theology of religious aesthetics” that seeks to describe what might be happening when persons engage in such

⁴³ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 98-99.

⁴⁶ Pamela Couture, “Pastoral Theology as Art,” in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 169-87.

activities.⁴⁷ Attention needs to be given to the relationship between aesthetics and pastoral theology because of the possibilities for transformation and healing that aesthetic experience can bring to personal and communal life. Like Couture, I seek to articulate the theoretical and practical value of engagement with rational as well as non-rational experience in the formation of pastoral leaders. My work is not situated directly within the field of feminist pastoral theology or religious aesthetics, as is Couture's, but we share the common concern of developing analysis that takes into consideration the experiences of marginalized persons.

Henry Close has discussed the value of introducing play into his supervisory work in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).⁴⁸ The author suggests that play informs the ability to develop intimate relationships in two ways: play increases the "sharing of pleasures" which facilitates the emergence of community among persons, and play allows for the "sharing of secrets" which allows persons to express personal vulnerability.⁴⁹ Close is one of the first persons in the CPE movement to recognize the possible value of play for clinical education. The writing is limited, however, in its depth of theoretical analysis. Babette Davis Reeves reflects on the psychological, theological, and professional ministry dimensions of play. The author suggests that play is needed across the span of human development. Reeves contends that play fosters growth and maturation into Christian identity, allows ministers to adapt care-giving responses to persons at the developmentally appropriate level, and locates the church as center for both play and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁸ Henry Close, "Play in CPE," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 29 (December 1975): 241-47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 245-47.

work.⁵⁰ Reeves raises many thoughtful ideas and suggestions in this work, but does not develop a consistent theoretical framework for a theology of play that may be implemented in pastoral ministry. My work differs from Reeves' as I am primarily concerned about the articulation of play theory and practices for pastoral theology, care, and counseling contexts within theological education.

Professional Projects on Play

A number of professional projects related to play and pastoral ministry have contributed to the literature in the field. I acknowledge them in the literature review because they signify the importance of the topic of play to persons preparing for professional pastoral ministry in schools, congregations, and clinical settings.

Morris H. Springer has argued that play helps ministers to balance their work lives. The author contends that the health of clergy members depends on the integration of play with work and family life.⁵¹ My work recognizes the need for clergy to strive for balance in personal and professional life. I argue for play's benefit to vital psychic life, but I do not explore the implications for play within the family life of pastoral leaders. Anne W. Strand argues that the ability to play is reflective of a mature faith. The author draws connections between the theories of Freud, Jung, Proff, Winnicott, Gendlin, her own experience, and the experiences of her patients.⁵² Like mine, Strand's research challenges the assumption that play is a beneficial experience only for children. My also work shares a methodological commonality with Strand as we both seek to ground our

⁵⁰Babette Davis Reeves, "A Theology of Play," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 2 (1989): 17-26.

⁵¹ Morris H. Springer, "Of What Value is Play in the Ministry?" (D.Min. thesis., University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, 1990).

⁵² Anne W. Strand, "Play and the Transformative Journey: A Study in the Individuation of the Playself" (D.Min. thesis, Andover Newton Theological School, 1994).

claims in relevant theory as well as our own experience, and the experience of others. Tom Plaizier suggests that play is a means to be creative and have fun in the church. The author designs and introduces a labyrinth as a means to support creativity and play in the spiritual formation of local church members.⁵³ My research shares with Plaizier's work a commitment to foster practices that support the faith development of persons. Mary Ellen Johnson has developed a project for teaching adults in a local church about a theology of play and a means to connect experientially with their own inner child. The author finds, through a number of evaluative means, that adults are able to learn about these matters even within a relatively brief adult education course.⁵⁴ Johnson's work focuses on play as an educational method that supports adult learning in the parish while my research is primarily concerned with adult learning in professional contexts of theological education.

Play in Systematic Theology

I briefly describe the contribution of systematic theologians, and acknowledge how the work I am using fits within their larger projects. The thought of Alfred North Whitehead informs the theological worldview developed in this dissertation. Whitehead himself was not a theologian, but was a logician and metaphysicist at Harvard University whose thought has influenced the development of process theology. Whitehead postulated a cosmology in which every aspect of the universe, including God, affects and

⁵³ Tom Plaizier, "Creativity, Fun and Play: God's Gifts for the Ministry of the Local Congregation" (D.Min. thesis, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1997).

⁵⁴ Mary Ellen Johnson, "An Adult Education Event for a Parish Based Upon Jesus' Teachings about Children in the Kingdom of God" (D. Min. thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 1996).

is affected by every other aspect. He referred to these aspects as “occasions” of experience. Reality, in this view, is continually in the process of becoming.⁵⁵

Bernard Loomer, a philosophical theologian whose work was influenced by the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, taught at the University of Chicago for many years. Loomer can be identified as a process theologian in the empirical school of thought. Loomer was centrally concerned with knowledge based on concrete experience, as opposed to theoretical abstractions. The work I draw on in Chapter 4 is developed late in his career, and reflects Loomer’s mature scholarly insight and analysis.⁵⁶

Gordon Kaufman, theologian emeritus at Harvard University, has devoted much of his scholarly career to the development of theological construction. Kaufman is interested in finding critical and meaningful ways to link the Christian faith with the concerns of modernity. The article I use primarily in Chapter 4, “On Thinking of God as Serendipitous Creativity,” is some of Kaufman’s most recent scholarly reflection that follows a major work, *In Face of Mystery*.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978); *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); *Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).

⁵⁶ See Bernard M. Loomer, “S-I-Z-E is the Measure,” in *Religious Experience and Process Theology*, ed. Harry James Cargas and Bernard Lee (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 69-76; and “Two Kinds of Power,” in *Criterion* 15 (Winter 1976): 11-29. A complete bibliography of Loomer’s work can be found in William Dean and Larry Axel, *The Size of God* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 18-19.

⁵⁷ Gordon D. Kaufman, “On Thinking of God as Serendipitous Creativity,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (June 2001): 409-25. *In Face of Mystery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Earlier writings include the following: *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); *The Theological Imagination* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981); *Nonresistance and Responsibility, and Other Mennonite Essays* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1979); *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975); *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner’s, 1969); *The Context of Decision* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961); and *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

Jurgen Moltmann, whose work figures prominently in Chapter 5, is a political theologian emeritus at Tübingen University. Moltmann has written extensively on eschatology and ecclesiology in which he envisions the church as voluntary fellowship, as a liberated and liberating community. In the work I use, *A Theology of Play*, Moltmann holds central the concern for the enjoyment of God and creation in the midst of efforts to bring about social transformation. The theology is developed during the period in which he writes a trilogy focused on eschatology.⁵⁸ His other work carries forth the theme of a socially critical church that identifies with the marginalized in society.⁵⁹

The above mentioned systematic theologians contribute to my theological worldview, which values play as an appropriate concept because it works with delight in this theology. In this dissertation I am not simply arguing that pastors and ministers ought to play just because play is a good thing, which, of course, I think it is. But I am also advocating that ministers and educators need to value play because it has theological significance. Play can lead to a greater trust in oneself and trust in God. Also, the ability to play—to respond creatively, serendipitously, and enthusiastically in the world—is part of what it means to live a redeemed Christian life.

Let me suggest a number of aspects that are valued and highlighted from the perspective of a theology of play. First, a theology of play privileges the so-called insignificant aspects of life as much as those we might ordinarily deem significant. Play

⁵⁸ See Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974); and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁵⁹ See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); *God in Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985); *The Way of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1990); *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); and *The Coming of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

takes delight and finds excitement in the ordinary, and perhaps even mundane, aspects of life. In fact, play allows for the possibility for re-enchantment of these ordinary events. Second, a relational theology of play values the many dimensions of human relationship, including those that might be considered “merely social.” A theology of play envisions that the emotional, psychological, and intellectual stimulation that comes from such interactions can deeply inform the meaning of our lives and ministries. Third, a theology of play recognizes the benefit of making way for, and embracing, whole-hearted joy for its own sake as well as for the healing it can bring to the human heart. A theology of play affirms that a joy-filled life is the birthright of all persons and communities. Finally, a relational theology of play takes into account personal, social, and institutional barriers as well as fractured relationships that can restrict the expression of creativity. A theology of play is not naively optimistic in its analysis of personal and social relationships of power.

We have considered a theological worldview that values the significance of play and the theorists upon whose work the argument in the dissertation relies. A more detailed discussion of how a theology of play contributes to the development of soulful leaders will be developed in Chapter 4. A number of other prominent systematic theologians have addressed the topic of play. Harvey Cox, a systematic theologian, has addressed the need to recover the value of festivity and fantasy in religious life. Cox explores the meaning of the “Feast of Fools,” a holiday in medieval Europe, during which period it was the custom to ridicule social customs and conventions. What needs to be retrieved in Western Christianity, Cox argues, is the spirit of the feast of fools, since this “spirit” of celebration and festivity can serve as a critique to social and theological notions that emphasize work and productivity as the chief purpose of humanity. In this

work, based in a theological anthropology of hope. Cox also examines the experience of faith itself as a form of play.⁶⁰ My research, like Cox's, is grounded in a theological conviction that life for all persons and communities is meant for enjoyment and flourishing. My work differs from Cox in that I do not argue for the retrieval of a lost tradition.

Rita Nakashima Brock, a feminist theologian, argues that play is life-sustaining activity that is the basis for "freedom, creativity, and spontaneity."⁶¹ Our ability to play is connected to what Brock identifies as "erotic power," our primal interrelatedness as human beings.⁶² Brock argues for a christology that honors the power of relational community to bring healing of heart—full, embodied knowing and relationality—to a brokenhearted world. Brock's analysis, like mine, draws upon the theoretical work of D.W. Winnicott to argue that healthy human personhood is deeply interconnected with the environment and other persons. Human character and selfhood develops in the creative intermediary space between self and others. Brock grounds her analysis in a process-relational worldview, a theological perspective that I share.

Robert K. Johnston, a theologian in the evangelical tradition, argues for what he calls the recovery of a biblically-based understanding of play. Johnston defines the problem of contemporary life as lacking in leisure time, and proceeds to consider several theological options to resolve that problem, which include play as total ideology, play as politics, and play as preparatory to religion.⁶³ Johnston argues that play is not itself

⁶⁰ Cox, *Feast of Fools*.

⁶¹ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988), 36.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶³ Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 53-81.

religion, but prepares the way for an experience of authentic faith. Johnston proposes a biblical model of play using analysis of scriptural texts from the Old and New Testaments to evidence the many ways in which the Bible supports play.⁶⁴ While I do not share Johnston's methodological trajectory—his argument for the benefit of play based on the authority of scripture—I agree with his theological conviction that play itself may open persons and communities to be surprised by joy in faith life.

Imagination

I examine literature related to imagination in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling because of the role it plays in the development of vital psychic life, and its close association with play. Play can both spark, and be sparked by, imagination. In playing, human persons may be able to envision images for life and ministry, and simultaneously begin to reflect theologically on these images. Literature pertaining to imagination addresses a number of themes. Gordon Jackson has argued for the need to engage the imagination as a means for discovering rich images and metaphors for ministry.⁶⁵ Jackson suggests that the ability to recover an awareness of ministry's sacrality relates to our ability to generate, and to respond to, creative images. Jackson contends that "fundamental spirituality is enabled by the play of the imagination to let the eyes see, the ears hear, [and] the soul feed on the divine Reality."⁶⁶ The strength of Jackson's writing lies in his concern to link the complex notions of process theology with the actual practice of ministry, however, the analysis is obstructed at times by the introduction of too much source material and lacks explanation of complex philosophical

⁶⁴ Ibid., 83-124.

⁶⁵ Gordon E. Jackson, *A Theology for Ministry* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998), 76-88.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 86.

ideas. Jackson has also argued, in conversation with the process theological perspective, that creative transformation can occur in contexts of pastoral care and counseling. He contends that as persons develop reason and insight into psychological problems they also begin to imagine themselves into a new future.⁶⁷ My research, like Jackson's, seeks to articulate a theological grounding for the work of ministry.

Christie Cozad Neuger explores the benefits of engaging the imagination—in the form of guided imagery and daydream therapy—in order to provide pastoral care and counseling to persons in grief, depression, or transition.⁶⁸ Neuger argues that imagination can help develop insight and knowledge about the Christian faith that is itself rich in imagery, and can support psychological health and well being.⁶⁹ Neuger demonstrates how clients explore and express the meaning of experience with God through the use of metaphor and imagination. The use of imagination, a form of psychic play, can help to bring restorative healing to persons, a healing that might not otherwise be available through more rational and linear discourse. My research differs in application from Neuger, whose primary emphasis is upon the use of imagination in pastoral counseling relationships between a trained practitioner and client.

Christie Cozad Neuger and Judith E. Sanderson share their goals, themes, and methods for a team-taught course to foster imagination with theological students.⁷⁰ The rationale for the course is built upon the assumption that "imagination is a playground on

⁶⁷ Gordon E. Jackson, *Pastoral Care and Process Theology* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1981), 91-95.

⁶⁸ Christie Cozad Neuger, "Imagination in Pastoral Care and Counseling," in *Handbook for Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Howard W. Stone and William M. Clements (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 150-71.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁰ Christie Cozad Neuger and Judith E. Sanderson, "Developing a Prophetic Imagination: A Course for Seminary Students," *Religious Education* 87 (Spring 1992): 269-82.

which we meet God.”⁷¹ The authors argue that theological students need to be equipped with the analytical tools and practical experience in working with images since their use can affect the various dimensions of ministry and also contribute to the ability to envision socio-cultural change. The goals and methods for the course include the following: the critique of biblical and theological images in order to question assumptions about religious beliefs and practices; the reconstruction of potentially life-giving images within the context of a diverse community so as to include the experience of marginalized persons; the intention to draw forth thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and images from students participating in the course; the cooperative and collaborative evaluation of the strengths and limitations of images as discerned through class discussion and the expertise of the instructors (one with training in bible and the other in practical theology); and the fostering of students’ ability to increase awareness of the images guiding their ministries and to grow in the capacity to imagine new ways to engage in preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.⁷² My research on play shares a common assumption with Neuger and Sanderson: theological students can benefit from the development of innovative and creative teaching practices that respect religious tradition and also seek to contribute to its ongoing transformation.

Ann and Barry Ulanov, writing from a Jungian perspective, suggest that images, which arise in the creative in-between space of psyche and soul, lead to healing and need to be given attention in our pastoral caregiving.⁷³ Through the process of simply allowing images to be, the authors argue persons can access that which is unconscious

⁷¹ Ibid., 269.

⁷² Ibid., 270-72.

⁷³ Ann Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *The Healing Imagination* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

and make it conscious. The authors write, "In letting be, we agree to the blurring of the usual categories of discrimination and open ourselves to the shock and wonder and joy."⁷⁴ Moreover, imagination plays a role in every aspect of experience, in thinking and feeling, as well as in intuiting and sensing.⁷⁵ The Ulanovs' analysis of imagination includes its value in relation to ministry and pastoral care. Several chapters are particularly illuminative. In a chapter entitled "Imagination and Ministry," the authors argue that ministry, preaching, counseling and spiritual direction need to take into account the idiosyncratic images of God that persons bring, for it is here, in the exploration of particular experience and images, that ministers can help persons grow in faith.⁷⁶ In another chapter entitled, "Who Feeds the Feeder?" the authors suggest several means by which pastoral ministers may be able to invigorate their imaginative life in order to avoid "burn-out" or "burn-up" in ministry: entering a course of personal psychotherapy, putting one's self in new situations, and engaging in spiritual reading.⁷⁷ My research on play shares much in common with the Ulanovs' writing on imagination. Caring well for personal imaginative life, like caring for play, may lead to psychic healing for one's self and others in ministry. Imagination, like play, is a means to negotiate the transitional space—what Winnicott calls the intermediate space—and can serve the ongoing work of relating with self, others, and God as we make meaning of our existence.

⁷⁴Ibid., 22.

⁷⁵Ibid., 13.

⁷⁶Ibid., 57-72.

⁷⁷Ibid., 93-112.

Ritual

Ritual is a pastoral theological theme closely related to the topic of play. Ritual, I argue, is a highly ordered and stylized form of play. A number of theorists in the field of pastoral theology have addressed the topic of ritual. Elaine Ramshaw has explored the ways in which “healthy ritual” meets the pastoral care needs of persons and communities.⁷⁸ Ramshaw seeks to bridge the often dichotomized realms of the privatized pastoral care encounter and the public liturgical practices of the church. Play, as it is argued in this dissertation, can help to make connections between the inner world experience of persons and the outer world of religious symbols and meaning. Play as ritual can assist persons and communities as well to negotiate transitions in personal and corporate life. Play as ritual, I argue, can help leaders and members to adapt to the changing needs and circumstances of Christian congregations. However, there is a limitation here with regard to the argument in the dissertation: under certain conditions, such as persons and communities that have experienced much change—and perhaps upheaval (such as severe trauma or abuse, for instance)—the continuity of predictable ritual forms is a necessary and appropriate means to care for those who have been deeply fractured and wounded.

Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley have articulated the value of the narrative approach to ritual and pastoral care.⁷⁹ The authors argue that stories are an important means by which persons communicate meaning and express themselves to others. Play as ritual takes seriously the particularity of these stories and considers possibilities for

⁷⁸ Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 88.

⁷⁹ Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

practice that may have not been previously imagined, and which are simultaneously sensitive to the needs that contribute to healing for persons and communities. Religious leaders, I argue, may be able to contribute to faithful living to the extent that they give attention to meaningful ritual that also connects with authentic human stories. Again, I point out a caution with regard to the argument: in playing with ritual, pastoral leaders need to remain aware that persons and communities have a psychic need for structure as well as flexibility. In play, as with ritual, pastors need to proceed with care and sensitivity since the symbols of the Christian faith are imbued with a multiplicity of meanings. Clinical pastoral supervisors and theologians have considered the theoretical underpinnings for, and the experimentation with, various ritual practices.⁸⁰ The theory and practices, born of respect for a wide variety of expressions of the Christian faith, as well as for commitment to ongoing transformational work of person and communities, are necessary in order to serve the educational needs of a diversity of theological students preparing for religious leadership. In short, ritual—as with play—may be able to preserve the best aspects of tradition while also making available space for novel and meaningful expressions of faith. My research on the play of misfit ministers argues that creative leadership practices help to contribute to the expression of vitality in religious ritual.

Literature on Theological Education

This dissertation enters an already rich conversation about the challenges to contemporary theological education that has continued steadily for almost three

⁸⁰ “Supervision of Ritual, Rituals of Supervision,” Symposium papers, *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* 19 (1998-99).

decades.⁸¹ Edward Farley traces the historical roots leading to the contemporary “clerical paradigm”—in which disparate fields of study are connected by the capacity to prepare seminarians for future leadership responsibilities—and proposes, instead, a *habitus* of theological education in *theologia*, or theological understanding.⁸² Farley seeks to reclaim the classical meaning of *habitus*, theology as wisdom and science. By this formulation, Farley proposes that the unity of theological education comes through reflective learning. Farley’s writing, one of the foundational pieces on theological education, is highly theoretical and invites analysis of how *theologia* as *habitus* can be embodied in the practices of theological education.

Joseph Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr. build a case for the construction of theological education as a form of professional education rooted in the theological identity of the church, and what it means to be Christian community in the world.⁸³ They propose using the term “practical theologian” to designate the primary function of the office of pastoral leadership. Hough and Cobb disagree with Farley on the nature of the problem with theological education. Farley argues that the problem with the education is the dominance of the clergy paradigm, while Hough and Cobb argue that the problem lies with the church denominations who are “uncertain and confused” as to what constitutes professional ministry.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Noteworthy texts in this conversation include the following. Edward Farley, *Theologia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); Joseph Hough and John Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985); Katie Cannon et al., (The Mud Flower Collective), *God’s Fierce Whimsy* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985); and Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

⁸² Farley, *Theologia*.

⁸³ Hough and Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

The analysis in the dissertation also builds on the perspective that David Kelsey suggests is the most distinctive aspect of theological education. Kelsey proposes that the formation of understanding may come through the development of “conceptual capacities, *habitus*, that is, dispositions and competencies to act, that enable us to apprehend God and refer all things including ourselves to God.”⁸⁵ The purpose of a theological school, in Kelsey’s view, is to develop practices that contribute to a true understanding of God.⁸⁶ By “true,” Kelsey means that theological education needs to take into consideration the many communities, with differing practices and beliefs, which identify themselves as Christian.⁸⁷ Moreover, Kelsey names the dilemma of how best to prepare persons for church leadership as the “theological school paradox”: “It is precisely by being schooled in a way that is governed by an apparently nonutilitarian (read: “useless”) overarching goal (that is, to understand God simply for the sake of understanding God) that persons can best be prepared to provide church leadership.”⁸⁸ I argue that theological schools need imaginative and creative ways to help persons “understand God” as Kelsey describes, and to relate this “understanding” to other persons. I argue that play as emancipatory education practice can provide one such means. My research, however, does not seek to develop an over-all theoretical framework for theological education as Farley, Hough and Cobb, and Kelsey do.

Craig Dykstra, trained in religious education, proposes that the constitutive practices of the Christian faith are the heart of theology as *habitus*. Education of seminarians and congregants alike should be steeped in the “profound, life-orienting,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 228.

⁸⁶ Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 245.

identity-shaping participation” in the practices that shape the faith.⁸⁹ My work takes Dykstra’s proposal seriously. Throughout the analysis, I develop practices of play that inform pastoral ministry, leadership, education, and caring with theological misfits. Dykstra suggests that *habitus* requires ordered learning, but should not be limited to cognition and interpretation.⁹⁰ His definition of practice follows: “Practice is participation in a cooperatively formed pattern of activity that emerges out of a complex tradition of interactions among many people sustained over a long period of time.”⁹¹ The definition highlights that practice is not primarily about an individual person doing something. Furthermore, Dykstra contends that persons who are competent in various practices may serve as teachers, models, mentors, and partners in practice.⁹² I agree with Dykstra that *habitus* need not be limited to cognitive and interpretive means. As important as the life of the mind is, we do not meet God only in thought. My research on creative and innovative practices for misfit ministers builds on Dykstra’s theory. The analysis in this dissertation, however, focuses primarily on the development of practices within contexts of pastoral theology and clinical pastoral education.

Rebecca Chopp focuses on the particular needs and contributions of women in theological education. Through a feminist methodology, she attends to a concrete analysis of how education for women (as well as men) might be strengthened through the

⁸⁹ Craig Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice,” in *Shifting Boundaries*, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 50.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹² Dykstra outlines the conditions under which persons may best learn practices. I summarize the work for our consideration in relation to the material explored especially in Chapters 4-6: (1) when in actual interaction with other people; (2) when in participation jointly with others, especially with those who are skilled and capable of teaching them; (3) when the persons involved with the practices are, or are becoming, “personally significant to us”; (4) when our involvement with the practices includes ever-growing complexity; (5) when we grow in the ability to speak of the significance of the practice, and interconnection with other practices; and (6) when persons claim personal responsibility for “initiating, pursuing, and sustaining” the practices, and for “including and guiding others in them.” See Dykstra, 51.

practices of narrativity, *ekklesia*, and theology.⁹³ My own perspective on *habitus* is closely aligned with that of Chopp who contends that education as *habitus* (theological wisdom) involves “the formation of self and community as well as the reformulation of imaginative, aesthetic, and linguistic learning.”⁹⁴ Chopp makes the point that *habitus* requires more than rearranging the curriculum, although this may be a necessary step in some cases. Chopp argues that we need to ask questions and reflect critically on the process, content, context, and persons related to our teaching.

Chopp rightly points out that the formal theory of the first generation of writers on theological education⁹⁵ needs reformulation into practical “methods that can anticipate possibilities for transformation our midst.”⁹⁶ My work, like Chopp’s, is located more particularly than the other literature on theological education. That is, I focus on analysis that addresses a set of persons and qualities, not the entirety of theological education. Persons most apt to benefit from the argument in this dissertation are most likely to be schooled in the personality and social sciences, and responsible for educating ministers to reflect theologically on the practical and pastoral aspects of ministry.

My contribution to the field of literature on theological education, nevertheless, relies on the theory and insights of these scholars. I bring my perspective as a pastoral theologian to the discussion: I am committed theological and theoretical analysis of the care-giving dimension of religious leadership. As a pastoral theologian and educator, I know that creative ministry, as a response to the creativity of God, requires a commitment to rigorous analysis of care practices that can support the well being of

⁹³ Chopp, *Saving Work*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁵ See particularly Farley, *Theologia*; and Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly*.

⁹⁶ Chopp, *Saving Work*, 11.

persons and communities. With the field of practical theology, I share a respect for what, at times, can be chaotic life in ministry and the on-going efforts to generate scholarly reflection on the nature of this reality.

Theory of Marginality

Play as an educational practice serves the purpose of negotiating the inherent tensions of marginality. Theological educators have articulated the value of marginality in different ways. Consider the following issues raised by marginality.

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza suggests that one possibility for women living in the midst of patriarchal structures is to live as “resident aliens,” an identity that requires women stand simultaneously as insider and outsider to the patriarchal system in order to transform it.⁹⁷ Maria Harris suggests that the experience of standing on the outside offers the opportunity to discover meaning in the strange and surprising. The experience of being an outsider provides a kind of knowing that needs to be respected and cultivated: “It is the thing that does not ‘fit’ which lures us and leads us on.”⁹⁸ In her reflection, Harris uses a notion prominent in process theology: ‘lure’ is related to the persuasive power of God, which is ever present and persistent in its effort to invite us to a more creative and richly complex living.

Jung Young Lee distinguishes among three types of marginality: in-between, in-both, and in-beyond.⁹⁹ First, Lee asserts that the experience of living “in-between two worlds means to be fully in neither.”¹⁰⁰ This living in between worlds has deleterious

⁹⁷ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 185. There are other meanings associated with this phrase. Hauerwas and Willimon use the phrase “resident aliens” which refers to the church as a Christian colony within the land of contemporary culture. See Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 78.

⁹⁸ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 99.

⁹⁹ Lee, *Marginality*, 29-76.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

effects on the psyche. in that one feels completely out of place. seemingly belonging nowhere. Lee identifies a second type of marginality that he calls a self-affirming understanding of marginality: "in-both."¹⁰¹ Lee asserts that "in-both" does not negate "in-between." but builds on and extends the idea. This definition of marginality is self-affirming because it has been developed by ethnic minorities themselves. not applied to these persons by the dominant culture. As a theoretical formulation. "in-both" is a concept that holds the tension of having one foot planted in two different worlds. Third. Lee argues for a "holistic definition" of marginality that he identifies as "in-beyond." This definition moves the focus to the experience of marginalized persons themselves who may not be "marginalized" from their own perspective. but rather living in two simultaneous worlds. With the concept "in-beyond." Lee points to the interpenetration of both positive and negative experiences of marginality. This phraseology suggests that harmony. rather than union. is the goal of the new marginal existence. Lee argues that this conceptualization of transcendence means to be "free of the two different worlds in which persons exist. but to live in both of them without being bound by either of them."¹⁰² As a pastoral theologian. I focus on helping misfit persons identify the pain as well as the joy of living in two different worlds. That is. I argue in order for persons to be "not bound" by cultural and social expectations. and to live "free" of these worlds. as Lee suggests. they need to investigate how they themselves have been hurt and helped by living in two different worlds. In this way. from my pastoral theological point of view. persons are more able to embrace the difficulties as well as the blessings of such existence.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰² Ibid., 63.

The aforementioned educators offer useful support and critique for my argument in favor of developing misfits. That is, marginality may be understood in a variety of ways. The theorists point out that marginality for some persons is a matter of being outsider and insider simultaneously, according to Schussler Fiorenza; that marginality serves as an educational principle that affirms a new kind of knowing, as Harris points out; and, that marginality calls for living an existence of transcendence and transformation, from Lee's perspective. The education of religious misfits holds the possibility for navigating the tension between conformity and idiosyncrasy in many ways.

Misfit as Metaphor

My work stands in relation to the literature that has sought to develop metaphors that name and provide a vision for who we are, and what we do, as ministers. Theological education needs useable language—vivid and descriptive metaphors—to reflect the reality of contemporary pastoral leadership.¹⁰³ Compelling metaphors, in my view, provide a vision for pastoral ministry by stimulating our thinking in provocative ways.¹⁰⁴ Sallie McFague points out in regard to good metaphors: they shock us, upset conventions, involve tension, and are implicitly revolutionary.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Brita L. Gill-Austern has described five different metaphors that shape the identity of teachers who employ a feminist/liberationist pedagogy: teacher as midwife, voice coach, storyteller and evoker of stories, contemplative artist, and reticent outlaw. See Brita L. Gill-Austern, "Pedagogy Under the Influence of Feminism and Womanism," in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 149-168.

¹⁰⁴ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). The authors argue that metaphors are not ornate additions to language, but rather are inextricably linked to the way humans think. Their argument challenges some basic assumptions about human persons and human rationality that persons in the West have held for well over two millennia. Empirical research supports a change in view of rationality: reason is not entirely literal, but also imaginative and metaphorical; and reason is emotionally engaged, not dispassionate. This research argues that metaphor is integral to our living, and makes more complex the previously constructed dualities between reason and emotion, and between reason and imagination.

¹⁰⁵ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 17.

Metaphors shape our reality. Consider McFague's comparison of the metaphor of earth as hotel with the metaphor of earth as home. We are much more likely to treat the earth with care if we consider it our home. We assume it to be our responsibility to attend to all of the care practices that sustain a livable and hospitable environment. The space is livable precisely because we have cared for it. In contrast, if we consider the earth as a hotel, we are likely to treat it as such. We are likely to see creation as something that needs to serve our ends when it is convenient for us. We assume that resources are at our disposal. We are likely to give little care to the environment since we assume that it is someone else's responsibility to do so. McFague's example dramatically illustrates how the power of metaphor informs our thoughts and actions in the world.¹⁰⁶ Metaphors, then, are to be taken seriously.

Seward Hiltner, a prominent figure in the field of pastoral theology in the mid-twentieth century thoughtfully and consistently developed the metaphor of shepherd as a guiding image to connect the various facets of pastoral ministry.¹⁰⁷ The metaphor was, and still is, useful. However, much in theological education and pastoral ministry has changed since the 1950s. The image does not convey, sufficiently enough, the inherent diversity among persons and the differing means necessary for their empowerment as mature Christian beings. The presence of many more women, persons of color, and second-career persons have affected the composition of the schools. Ministers in the contemporary era, in contrast to those who served in a period of stable and growing memberships, are often called to serve communities in the midst of radical change, flux, as well as decline. While the metaphor of the pastor as shepherd enjoys some enduring

¹⁰⁶ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 56-57.

¹⁰⁷ See Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958).

resonance with contemporary ministers, it is, nevertheless, limited in its current application. The scholarship of Alastair Campbell, a Scottish pastoral theologian, argues that we need to recover the vital qualities of three different images of pastoral care.¹⁰⁸ The images and the corresponding qualities that they bring to pastoral care are as follows: the shepherd offers the qualities of courage along with “tenderness, skill in leadership, concern for wholeness;¹⁰⁹ the wounded healer “restores fractured relationships between God, humanity, and the whole universe;”¹¹⁰ and the wise fool brings the gifts of simplicity, loyalty, and prophecy.¹¹¹ Campbell argues that the three images together provide a picture of what is particularly “pastoral” about pastoral care. The images, he argues, are connected to the historical resources—the scripture and tradition—of the Christian faith. My work builds on, and extends the image (I call it a metaphor) of the wise fool.

This leads to a final question with regard to metaphors. How does one assess a metaphor’s degree of useability? For our consideration, I suggest two criteria for determining the “useable” nature of a metaphor: (1) the degree to which it speaks to contemporary experience and challenges; that is, a metaphor needs to connect to the lived reality of persons and communities as well as call forth new thinking and vision about that reality; and (2) the variety and richness of interpretations that it calls forth is, in part, a reflection of the metaphor’s vitality and useability. Metaphors function in complex and ambiguous ways; lively metaphors defy reification. Since useable metaphors tend to be multivalent, they carry unintended meanings and connotations. Thus, while this

¹⁰⁸ Alastair V. Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55-71.

dissertation argues for a favorable interpretation of religious misfit, it is necessary also to anticipate the possible misuses and distortions of the metaphor. My research—including many conversations with people preparing for, and serving in the capacity of, religious ministry—has alerted me to the provocative nature of “misfit” as a metaphor. The metaphor elicits immediate and enthusiastic responses from some people. They assert that the metaphor reflects their experience, and then they proceed to describe and interpret how this is so. Others contemplate the term, acknowledging ways that it applies and does not apply to them. Still others would rather identify with another metaphor altogether. Indeed, the variety and richness of interpretation is a reflection that the metaphor has a dynamic quality. Even as my argument favors the useable nature of this metaphor, I also give attention throughout the text to its limitations.

Having explored in this chapter the broad range of literature pertinent to the topic, we turn in the next chapter to a focused examination of psychological literature that can more precisely inform our understanding of the creativity of misfit ministers.

CHAPTER 3

Red Light. Green Light: Contributions to Vitality and Creativity in Psychic Life

Life is a good teacher and a good friend. Things are always in transition, if we could only realize it. Nothing ever sums itself up in the way that we like to dream about it. The off-center, in-between state is an ideal situation, a situation in which we don't get caught and we can open our hearts and minds beyond limit. It's a very tender, nonaggressive, open-ended state of affairs.

Pema Chodron, *When Things Fall Apart*

So much depends on how we see things. I am reminded of this reality by the presence of a cut crystal prism that hangs from the window near my desk. As sunlight moves through the prism, it is refracted in many different directions and in various colors. This spectacle captures my attention because I love the way light "plays" through the glass. I see the light differently through this source. The light produces a dazzling array of color and splendor. When we pay attention to the prism of experience, we may grow in awareness that the process of living "off-center" and "in-between," in the words of Pema Chodron, may open our minds and hearts to the full spectrum of color.

This chapter brings to the fore the question of how to negotiate relationally the "in-between space," which constitutes and contributes to vitality and creativity in psychic life. A discussion of grief for increasing will illustrate the role of complex emotion in the psychic vitality of pastoral ministers. In short, I will argue that the notion of creativity, like life itself, is not static. Psychological literature will be used to show that healthy and vital psychic life emerges from the complex interplay between conformity and idiosyncrasy. In the psychological literature, it becomes more evident that play and creativity are close approximations of one another, if not outright synonyms. Variations on this argument—how creativity is in constant motion—can be, and need to be, made

from the vantagepoint of many different disciplines and perspectives. As a pastoral theologian and educator, I build the argument in conversation with the sources of the discipline of psychology because its theoreticians and clinicians have a particular expertise in psychic life, a primary source of data for pastoral theology, care, and counseling.

The chapter adheres to the following outline. First, I consider the meaning of normalcy and health, and instead propose language that more appropriately refers to the complexity of human psychological development and maturity. Second, the discussion moves to analysis of the function of emotionality and feelings, specifically with respect to marginalized experience. Play requires the involvement of our emotions and feelings. Yet, before many adults can open their hearts to the wonder of playful existence, they might need to grieve the attachment to a pre-conceived or primarily externally defined identity of who they are. Misfits may not always initially be able or willing to play because of the vulnerability and wounding they may have experienced. Therefore, I give specific attention to the process of grief because it includes a nexus of emotions, often considered antithetical to play, but which, in fact, can open our hearts to the possibility of play. The theoretical work of Daniel Goleman supports the argument in this section. Third, I turn to a discussion of the object relations theory of D.W. Winnicott to illumine what actually occurs psychodynamically through play. The theory and ensuing analysis places an emphasis on play as a primary form of creativity for the human person. The notion of mis-fitting, from this perspective, is shown to be a vital source of creativity. A brief addendum from the psychological work of Howard Gardner supplements and extends the play theory of Winnicott.

Casting Our Lens

The perspective that we hold influences how we see things, as my example of the prism highlights. In part, the perspective is informed by the definitions we hold and the interpretations we make. It is important, therefore, to distinguish briefly between normalcy, health, and vitality in psychic life and build a nuanced description of marginality.¹

Normalcy, Health, and Vitality

There are many tensions that we negotiate in our growth into personhood. I have lived with the possibility that “health” is a term that adequately names psychological maturity; but I have been persuaded differently in my research. A more detailed discussion is in order. Briefly, I will distinguish between three terms that are of importance in the assessment of psychological well being: normalcy, health, and vitality. This analysis extends the discussion of the criteria elaborated in Chapter 1.

The term *normalcy* implies adjustment to an externally defined standard. D.W. Winnicott, child psychiatrist and object relations theorist, rejects the use of “normal” to describe typical development, because he claims it reflects “facile thinking.”² To Winnicott’s mind, it is better to speak of “psychiatric health” which connotes “individual growth towards personal fulfillment.”³ As persons move toward personal fulfillment, they may come into conflict with standards and expectations of that which is widely considered to be normal. Normalcy signifies a limited number of psychological patterns that are considered within an acceptable range, according to the standard being applied.

¹ I am indebted to Nancy Chodorow for the insight I am building on here. She argues that the metapsychology a psychoanalyst holds will determine how feelings and experience are interpreted. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Power of Feelings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 15.

² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 141.

³ Ibid.

Normalcy is a problematic term when used to describe human persons because it does not sufficiently account for the complexity and diversity of experience and patterns of relationality.

Health generally refers to the absence of pathology. As noted above, Winnicott prefers the use of *health* because it allows for a wider range of human relating. The theory of Winnicott helps to move the discussion from “facile thinking” about normalcy to a wider consideration of health, particularly as it is supported through the development of play. Psychological health cannot be fully measured by conformity to external standards. In fact, in the psychological systems of Winnicott, as well as Carl Rogers,⁴ health is inversely related to conformity. According to Rogers and Winnicott, persons who are psychologically healthy probably do not conform completely to conventional standards of what is considered normal.

A third term, *vitality*, describes “essential aliveness and life-affirmation. ...human agency that manifests in passion and capacity to endure.”⁵ Vitality makes possible the movement toward, and the fulfillment of, abundant life. While vitality assumes psychological health, in my view it also signals that human life is meant for more than adjustment and conformity to social standards and expectations. My view is similar to those who argue that persons can live healthy lives and still have no idea who they are as persons.⁶ The challenge is to find a means to foster *vitality* and its expression in our personal lives and vocations.

⁴ See Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing, 1983), 283-307.

⁵ Greider, *Reckoning with Aggression*, 9.

⁶ Ulanov and Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, 95.

Marginality

In their extensive study of values and commitments, the authors of *Common Fire* identify ways in which persons contribute to the common good. One of these means is through participation in a “constructive, enlarging engagement with the other” beyond the concerns of one’s own particular “tribe” or grouping.⁷ The authors also point out that we ourselves are sometimes “the other.”⁸

While being marginal also may carry the stigma of feeling less valued, this positioning at the “edge of one’s tribe or society appears to contribute to the ability to move between tribes.”⁹ The authors assert that as teachers and ministers help marginal persons “to interpret difference in positive ways,” the marginalized are more likely to recognize the needs of the “stranger next door.”¹⁰ The authors distinguish between vulnerability-based and value-based marginality.¹¹ The former refers to the experience of feeling or being different that arises from circumstances beyond the control of the person, such as our race, sexual orientation, gender, social class, age, and degree of able-bodiedness, among others. The latter, value-based marginality, refers to the values by which we live our lives that may, to varying degrees, stand in contrast with the dominant culture. My argument in this chapter draws on both types of marginality—the vulnerability-based marginality of misfit, about which persons have no choice, and the value-based marginality that arises with commitments of religious faith. It is not at all certain that persons who are considered misfit or marginalized by social standards also

⁷ Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

hold values that would be considered marginal. For some, this “double tension” can be unbearable. Valuable skills, qualities, and characteristics emerge for persons and communities able to navigate the relational tensions inherent in the experience of marginality, as I argue in Chapter 4. Among these are the following: curiosity, spontaneity, passion/compassion, initiation, as well as the ability to lead with the head, the heart, and instinct.¹²

Reclaiming a “Misfit” Emotion: Grief

In part, what I am arguing for is a shift of reference. If our tendency is to look only for things that “fit,” then we may miss this opportunity to examine the misfits and their creative, vital potential for our communities. The technique of shifting or re-directing a perspective or frame of reference is frequently employed in pastoral psychotherapeutic contexts. The assumption is that we miss seeing something because we are not trained to focus our attention in certain directions. This shift of reference is needed because human experience includes not only rationality but also emotionality.

Emotions are a part of misfit experience that need to be reclaimed and integrated. I argue for a shift in perspective because of the importance of emotions in helping ministers provide care to others. Emotions themselves are “misfits” by virtue of the role usually assigned to them—they may be devalued or dismissed altogether—in traditional educational contexts. Sometimes, attention to emotional life is given only after consideration of other more “important” content matter in the curriculum.

My purpose in identifying emotions as “misfit experience” is actually a form of hyperbole, exaggeration in the service of making a larger point. Even as we may want to

¹² I am indebted to Matthew Fox for articulating some of the values listed here. See, for example, Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994).

push emotionality to the side, its importance cannot be underestimated in human life. Emotionality is only a misfit in a realm "governed" by rationality. But the situation is actually much more complex. In fact, Jack Katz, a social psychologist at University of California, Los Angeles, argues against the widely held perspective that considers emotions "as opposed to thinking."¹³ Katz contends that emotions are "paradoxically self-reflective actions and experiences" and that the "self-reflection in emotions is corporeal rather than a matter of discursive reasoning."¹⁴ In the experience of emotionality, Katz suggests, we encounter the "embodied foundations of ourselves."¹⁵ His thesis, and corresponding study of four different emotions (laughter, crying, shame, and anger) is made more nuanced and complex through the analytical insight that emotions are dialectical in nature. Emotions are something persons are at times able to control, and simultaneously, emotions are energy that sometimes arises separate from our conscious will. Emotionality, as a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, requires our attention because of the integral role it has in our ability to function as ministers, as persons who care for the psychospiritual well being of others.

One example of the importance of misfit emotion in the psychic life of ministers is grief. The development of healthy misfits requires attention to feelings and emotional states. Otherwise, feelings and emotional states may remain (or return to the) unconscious where they can lead to psychic and social distress. In order to support life in the margins, theological educators need to be familiar with the psychic terrain that

¹³ Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

comprises the experience of the misfit, and thereby be more adequately equipped to foster vitality, health, and wholeness.

I devote considerable attention to grieving because it is a central piece of emotional work for marginalized persons and communities. Grief does not describe the entirety of misfit experience. Yet, it focuses attention on what I consider to be an area of psychospiritual life that is often neglected. The process of grieving and attending to internal work can attune caregivers to the state of their own emotional lives. In the process of grieving, persons encounter a range of emotions, including feelings of loss and anger as well as joy and gratitude. Discussion of the complex emotionality involved with grieving is not tangential to the development of our livelihood and ministries, but integral to them. To ignore our need for emotionality is to separate us from the process of a natural cycle—the ongoing birth, life, and death of all things. To the extent that we ignore or do not attend to the various emotions connected with our grieving, we are, in effect, refusing to participate in our lives. And we do so not just to the peril of ourselves, but to the detriment and peril of others.

Let us examine two ways in which ignoring grief can have adverse effects. First, ignoring or not attending to our grief can lead into profound states of psychological depression. For some persons, the process of grieving is “stopped,” in effect, by a refusal, whether conscious or unconscious, to acknowledge experiences of pain and loss in their lives. The experience of depression can be, though is not always, a result of this refusal. In this case, an inability to acknowledge and to express grief carries with it the possible effect of disconnection from, or repression of, vitality. This inability or unwillingness to encounter and explore grief may itself be a signal that persons need the

assistance of a skilled professional. For ministers who regularly come into contact with the pain and concerns of other persons, it is all the more important to attend to the process of one's own grief. Otherwise, one's grief may become triggered and entangled with that of others, leaving the minister less effective in delivering care, and more susceptible to bouts of personal depression. Second, ignoring our grief can lead to higher degrees of irritability and restlessness. Pushing aside or ignoring grief, a form of disempowerment of the body's capacity for movement and activity, may contribute, in part, to the expression of what Kathleen Greider refers to as "violent aggression."¹⁶ Instead of responding with flexibility and resilience to the demands of life, persons may channel psychic energy in destructive ways. Persons may be more likely to inflict harm and trauma on others, rather than building mutual relationality. Ministers, then, need to attend to the process of grief in order to lessen the likelihood of releasing the effects through immature or unhealthy aggression.

From a pastoral theological point of view, the separation of emotions from religious life and practices can be harmful to self and to those entrusted to our care. This harm, in some cases, might have detrimental and irreversible relational effects. Such is the case when pastoral leaders, disconnected from their own psychological and emotional needs, violate physical and emotional boundaries with parishioners or students. Pastoral leaders, thus, not only have the capacity to support human flourishing but also have the ability to scar deeply the lives of the faithful.

Emotionality plays an integral role in human action and behavior. Daniel Goleman, a clinical psychologist by training, has identified and elaborated on the

¹⁶ Greider, *Reckoning with Aggression*, 48-55.

centrality of emotions for rationality.¹⁷ His thesis lends an important and critical perspective to the debate: emotions are complexly related to our rational lives. So, even as difficult as it may seem to forge an alliance between emotionality and rationality—e.g. allowing a rhythm in the classroom for both—such is necessary because it may contribute to the experience of the fullness of life. Attention to this dynamic is relegated to the domain of pastoral care and counseling in most seminary curricula, but the interplay between emotionality and rationality extends to other areas of the theological education curriculum as well.

An explication of Goleman's work helps us see, in more detail, the complex processes by which the brain "reads" emotions before the rational part of the brain is "aware" of what is taking place. Goleman argues that intellectual intelligence alone does not offer persons preparation for the challenges that life inevitably brings. The development of emotional intelligence, or what others have called character, can offer a means for navigating these challenges. Goleman contends that "emotional aptitude is a *meta-ability*" that governs how well persons employ the skills they have, including rational intelligence.¹⁸

Goleman argues that emotional intelligence may be directed in the following ways: (1) knowing one's emotions—we are then better able to "pilot" our lives; (2) managing emotions—relates to self-awareness; (3) motivating oneself—"marshalling emotions" in "service of a goal"; (4) recognizing emotions in others—allows for empathy, a foundational people-skill; and (5) handling relationships—"art of relationships is largely handling emotions in others." Competence in the development of

¹⁷ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

emotional intelligence contributes to “popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness.”¹⁹ Moreover, the development of emotional intelligence is indispensable for ministry, since persons must become adept at navigating the delicate balance—and sometimes imbalance—between emotional and rational life. Favoring one to the exclusion of the other denies us access to the full range of our own experience, as well as the complex experiences of other persons, especially those who are marginalized.

Attending to emotional life in general, and grief in particular, helps to foster emotional intelligence with marginalized persons and communities. As a collective community, we need to grieve—in the sense of letting go of attachment to—any one model of being a minister or being the church. So, I argue that as persons and communities grieve the “norm” of not fitting into a preconceived standard of living and relating, they may be able to access new possibilities for living and relating. This process is important, in my view, because it makes available psychic energy to commit ourselves anew to the tasks of ministry.

To emphasize: I am suggesting that in order for misfits to be healthy persons, they need to be intimately acquainted with their emotional lives. Psychological health and the intimate experience of life itself are related to our ability to grieve, to live into the experience of loss.²⁰ Grief dissolves. Grief disintegrates what has been. Grief is an internal process of letting go, of dying to attachments, of separation from persons and

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰ I am speaking of grief as a life-long process through which persons attend to experiences of loss and pain, both large and small. A number of scholarly practitioners have attended to the various “stages” of grieving and loss. For elaborated discussion of different stage theories, see Yorick Spiegel, *The Grief Process*, trans. Elisabeth Duke (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977); and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

ways of relating. If our lives are lived well, then, we must constantly attend to disintegration.

The process of grief changes us: we will never be the same again. Grief, when properly tended and cared for, has some of the qualities of play that also opens us to new and unimagined possibilities. Grieving is a continual process for all persons and it is made more complex and ambiguous for those who are marginalized. Attending to the processes of grief in life can make space for the ability to play. The misfit, like the clown, carries an admixture of joy and sadness, a smiling face and a feeling-filled heart.

Grieving, like playing, is a means to clear space in our lives, and it has both internal and external dimensions; that is, the emotionality of grief calls for personal attention and corporate ritual that provides a crucible for its emergence. We clear space to grieve, and grief clears space within us. Grieving, like playing, is best experienced in a non-controlling way, for it has its own rhythms and dimensions. Arguably, as well, the absence of grieving in public life may also speak to the absence of genuine play, of exhibiting a spirit of openness and flexibility to the options available to our most pressing problems and concerns. The church has ground on which to stand to be different from other public organizations in this regard. Religious communities have traditionally held the space for the expression of grief, usually at funerals and in memorial services, for example. If these spaces were not created for the expression of grief, then the emotions may be relegated to the unexamined corners of our experience.

Because of the importance of grief in the psychological and pastoral care dynamics related to death and dying, I pursued this interest for several years at the beginning of my ministry: I attended to many deaths and grieving families at the

Cleveland Clinic Foundation. Concurrently, I also served as pastor for a small congregation. As membership continued to decline and the surrounding neighborhood continued to change, and as parishioners struggled to understand themselves and their mission in light of changing circumstances, I realized that the pattern of grief extended beyond the clinic into the parish I served. Some persons were mourning for the days when the pews were filled, when the Sunday school was brimming with children, when the church still owned the manse before it had to be sold to pay off a minister who had sued the judicatory for wrongful termination. Immersion in these two different contexts of ministry taught me that grief has personal and communal dimensions.

Still, the challenges to finding space to grieve are often surprising. I remember once standing in the grocery store as a friend moved through the checkout line. As I stood there minding my own business, a man walked by and said, "What's wrong? You look like you just lost your best friend!" I was left speechless. Clearing a space for grief is necessary so that we are not assaulted with cultural expectations to put on a happy face. Grief may unsettle us as it shifts the ground of our experience. It is for these very reasons that this powerful process of emotional life needs a proper container, a place for its nurture and incubation, so that its current may carry away the debris of our lives.

A friend tells a story from her childhood. One day she noticed her mother sitting at the kitchen table crying. The little girl moved toward her mother and asked, "Mommy, why are you crying?" To this question, the mother responded with the statement: "I'm not crying." The little girl concluded that crying must be a terrible, shameful thing since her mother needed to lie about it.²¹ This illustration also alerts us to the complexity

²¹ Personal communication with interviewee, 25 April 2001.

involved in negotiating the private and public space of grieving. Since the expression of grief can leave persons feeling emotionally vulnerable, it may be necessary at times to establish protective barriers that can help guard this tender experience.

What would it mean to “play through our grief?” Playing through grief suggests that we may not need to know its name before we encounter the experience. Grief is sometimes hard for us to name. Most assuredly, we may know grief by the demands it places upon us. When grieving, we know of the need to retreat from the activities of everyday life and attend to our feelings and, often, tears, which are a natural extension of these feelings. Through practice, we may learn to “let grief be,” which means that we do not attempt to control, to mask, or to hide the feelings. Clearing a space for the grief, just as we might clear a space for play in our lives, may be the single most important commitment we can make.

An example of the personal and communal aspects of grieving come together for me in the image of Mary sitting at the empty tomb of Jesus and openly weeping. Mary comes expecting to find Jesus, and weeps because he is not there. A messenger, in the form of an angel, redirects her attention to where the one who has died can be found.²² While persons may grieve within the confines of their own homes or rooms, others grieve openly. Attention to grieving may get lost amid the pursuit of activity, of behavior that squelches, silences, or casts aside. Clearing space for grieving in our lives is essential for psychological well being. As the pericope from the gospel makes evident, grieving has a theological dimension to it. Grief—as it shakes our bodies and expresses itself in our

²² John 20: 11-18.

tears—can transform our experience and open our perspective to new life, to that which we call holy.

In sum, grieving is a process that attunes us to the emotional rhythm in our lives as misfit ministers. Knowing and attending to this process allows ministers to recognize, to help name, and to honor the experience of others who grieve, particularly those persons with whom we provide a ministry of support and care. Let us, then, consider several other linkages between grief and pastoral ministry as it can open the way for an in-depth discussion about play.

First, the shame that comes with “not fitting” can be powerful, and at times overwhelming, and can influence the experience of grieving. We touch strands of shame frequently in the ministry. Communities feel shame over not being able to attract new members in spite of many efforts and attempts in this regard. Colorful fliers, community events, and welcoming words from members sometimes may fail to increase membership. Communities may begin to question their worth, wondering what could possibly be wrong with them since their community is not experiencing any visible growth in numbers. This is how pernicious shame can be: it can rob religious communities of their sense of purpose and mission, if we are not careful. The prison of shame makes persons and communities to feel less than adequate. Pastoral ministers can be particularly helpful in guiding communities through an experience of shame, first, by assisting persons to question the social and religious standards against which they may be measuring themselves, and second, to grieve the loss of attachment to those standards. Care must be exercised in evaluating standards and guidelines because they also can function to hold persons and communities accountable to ethical behavior.

Nevertheless, healing shame and grieving attachment to external standards that helped instigate the shame can be beneficial pastoral tasks as they influence the ability for persons and communities to live more fully into relationship with God and one another. Small churches and their members may be particularly vulnerable to the experience of shame, and are, therefore, in need of pastors who can assist them in their grief work. Shame limits the range of life that persons and communities are able to experience. The process of grief helps to ease the constriction of shame and allows persons and communities the freedom to exercise their own unique gifts.

Second, the experience of grief can help persons relate empathetically with others, and also can be a means of softening the heart and opening persons to express true joy. As persons grieve the losses, pain, confusion in their own lives, they may grow in awareness of what Robert Kamm calls the “non-negotiables,” the core values and commitments that sustain our lives.²³ In my experience, we do not arrive easily at knowledge of these convictions. The notion of “non-negotiables” may initially seem contradictory to the experience of play itself. But I submit that in the experience of playing as well as in grieving persons may become more deeply aware of that which they most truly value. An example of a “non-negotiable” for me is the need to have a period of silence everyday. Of course, I am willing to accept that the conditions and the duration of this may vary depending on circumstances. But I claim this as a personal “non-negotiable”—that which most definitely needs to exist—because of the space it provides in my life for experiencing both grief and joy.

²³ Robert H. Kamm, *The Superman Syndrome* (San Luis Obispo, Calif.: 1stBooks), 221.

Part of the value of healthy misfit is to be capacitated with knowing and claiming one's core values and commitments, the "non-negotiables," even when they stand in tension with others. It is also important for misfits to stay relationally connected with ethically responsible persons and communities to help ensure that their core commitments and values serve, to the greatest extent possible, the well being of self and others. Grief calls forth from the lives of misfits and others the need to examine regularly core commitments and to re-focus or reinvest their vocation in a life-giving direction. This is an important process because the "non-negotiables" shift from one period of life to another.

Third, while grief can be arduous work, it can also breed a form of self-confidence. The process of grief can allow persons to experience themselves anew. In part, through grieving, persons psychologically can learn to peel back the layers of social conditioning that constrict the new growth into an expanded sense of their personhood. This process may initially seem tentative and fragile. Self-confidence is a matter of relationality and mutual influence between the individual psyche and the many communities of which persons are part. Thus, self-confidence is both belief in one's self, a basic trust in one's being and the ability to move in the environment with assurance, and faith, a "filling-out" of our community skin. Self-confidence may rise in proportion to persons' ability to live relationally, capable of knowing one's own direction and also of being able to influence and be influenced by others. Self-confidence can be strengthened from the inside out, and confirmed from the outside in, each time we perform a task or engage in an activity, or make a statement on our own behalf or that of others. Grief can release us to know a sense of ourselves "beneath" the experience of our

rational minds. In time, we may come to trust this basic sense of self, or what Winnicott calls "self-experience."²⁴

Trusting one's own "self-experience" can be a challenge for those who have been alienated, abused, or in any way separated from it. The work of pastoral counselors, pastoral therapists, spiritual psychotherapists and analysts can help persons reclaim trust. Abuse or disregard for self-experience is problematic for psychic as well as religious life, because as Ann Ulanov writes, "self-experience gives us experience of God."²⁵ Connection to self-experience allows persons to live their authentic truth, and acknowledge their deepest wisdom. We must have religious leadership equipped and capable to trust and to evaluate ethically their self-experience, because this self-experience can be a valuable source of our primary creativity.²⁶

The argument to this point has emphasized the fallacy inherent in what we usually consider "normalcy." Instead, we have seen that vitality in the psychic life of ministers can arise from the negotiation of marginality. An extended examination of the role of grief, its connections to the psychic life of misfits, serves as a prelude to play and the hopes and possibilities of living life "off-balance."

The Complexity of Experience and Off-Balance People

Grieving helps to increase vitality in the psychic life of pastoral ministers.

Connection with this vitality—our primary creativity—aids misfit ministers in their

²⁴ Winnicott suggests that the role of the analyst is to foster a space in the therapeutic encounter so that persons may find or recreate a sense of self-experience which may have been lost. D.W. Winnicott, *Holding and Interpretation: Fragment of an Analysis* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 7, 11, 15, 17. Cited by Ann Ulanov, *Finding Space*, 125.

²⁵ Ann Ulanov, *Finding Space*, 125.

²⁶ Ulanov argues the "presence of self-experience conveys what Winnicott calls primary creativity." *Ibid.*, 133.

ministries. My conviction is that off-balance people, those persons capable of engaging creatively and imaginatively, help to bring forth light and spontaneity. Grief can unite our psyche and soul in the hard work of letting go of attachment to personal and social expectations and standards which may be harmful to the psyche, and reattaching to goals and visions that bring us, as persons and communities, to a new-found place. This "place," as the psychological theory helps us to see, is not located at one point but in many. As we touch its transforming power, we may experience an inner transformation that also may put us at risk for being misunderstood by others. The argument of this dissertation is that the risk is worth taking when done on behalf of the common good.

Much of the passion and zest for life is negotiated "in the balance" or in the rhythm of in-balance and off-balance. This state of non-equilibrium, as Margaret Wheatley observes, allows for systems and persons to change and grow.²⁷ The teeter-totter is a childhood playground apparatus that draws our attention. The excitement and exhilaration from riding the teeter-totter comes from the constant motion of being off-balance, and from the fleeting but hope-filled moments of balance.

The experience of *healthy misfits*, I am arguing, can best be nurtured by the criteria with regard to life-giving and life-supportive play that were outlined in Chapter 1: in space that honors diversity and multiplicity, contrasts and openness, new patterns of behavior, and deeply felt and expressed emotion. In creative play, according to Ann and Barry Ulanov, is where psyche and soul meet.²⁸

²⁷ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1992), 78.

²⁸ Ulanov and Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, 95.

Having attended to important aspects that contribute to vital psychic life for the misfit minister—including knowledge of, and connection to, emotional life—this dissertation turns to a discussion of key components of D.W. Winnicott’s psychological theory of play. The psychological principles introduced will directly challenge the notion of conformity. Winnicott’s solution to the problem of navigating between conformity and idiosyncrasy is to argue that attachment to either pole can be problematic. Through the experience of play, human beings may be able to express their own creative potential, and stay relationally connected with others. Winnicott’s theory is valuable, from a pastoral perspective, because it constructs a theoretical a map of how human persons develop with all of our varying degrees of similarity and difference; and the theory is also valuable because it provides clues for pastoral ministry and caregiving.

Winnicottian Concepts

The discussion that follows will elaborate on key Winnicottian concepts as they pertain to the cultivation of healthy religious misfits. The sections include: play and play space, selfhood, and negotiating transitions. Winnicott’s theoretical model, it must be noted, seeks to describe a trajectory for healthy human development and to chart therapeutic interventions when psychiatric illness arises. The focus is on the development and maturation of the intrapsychic reality of the human person in relation to “objects.” In this theory, the human self develops in relation to significant persons, usually the primary caregiver, whose representations and qualities the emerging self internalizes. The theory postulates the nature of the relationships that human persons

internalize early in life affect, both positively and negatively, the quality of relationships that the self experiences in adulthood.²⁹

Play and Play Space

Play. Play is a significant principle within the Winnicottian framework and is defined as the inter-relating of internal object and external phenomena.³⁰ Play involves the negotiation of the space within a person, between persons, and within the environment, and first arises in the relationship that each infant has with her/his mother or the other primary caregiver. In the earliest stages of development, from the perspective of the infant, baby and mother are one, D.W. Winnicott argues. The infant gradually moves to the recognition that there is “me” and “not-me.”³¹ This growing awareness “me” and “not me” is an ongoing dynamic in psychic life that endures through our lifetimes. Hence what was once just a merger, or one-ness between mother and infant, now has “space.”

Second, this “space” between infant and mother (or partial representation of her, i.e. the breast) creates an area of illusion. That is, illusion refers to the infant’s awareness that “the breast itself is part of the infant,” and the little one has the sense of “magical control.”³² Winnicott names this area of illusion or space between mother and infant as the potential space.³³ Infant and mother are no longer merged but in relationship with one another. The potential space between one mother and one infant has its own unique qualities and dynamics, and this reality accounts for the vast differences between persons

²⁹ For explication of the theories and theorists associated with the object relations theory, see Peter Buckley, [M.D.], ed., *Essential Papers on Object Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

³⁰ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 100.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 53.

in their ability to play. Because of these differences, as well, pastoral educators need to exercise discretion in their own behavior and teach others to be sensitive to the reality that one person's intentionally playful action may be received or interpreted by another person as hurtful.

The relationship between misfit experience and play requires further exploration. Winnicott's theory teaches us, as educators and pastors, that each relationship is unique. Winnicott learned this lesson through direct therapeutic interaction with children and adults. He observed that psychotherapy is successful to the degree that the clinician is able to "play" with the client. In fact, he maintains that play is arguably the most important ingredient in the therapeutic relationship. Play and the ability to move into potential space/intermediate area allows for the development of creativity. In Winnicott's system, the health and maturation of human persons is marked by a life-long ability to continue to create. Play and the ability to move into potential space allows for persons to negotiate the constant change and flux of all life. Finally, play and the ability to move within the intermediate area is inherently exciting. Winnicott remarks that we experience our lives as an "exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation" in the transitional space between inner personal life and the "shared reality of the world."³⁴ Hopefully, life and ministry, even given the inevitable pain and vicissitudes, can be a playful adventure.

"The Stuff of Playing." We play, not so much to claim or relive childhood, but to touch the wonder and splendor of this life as creative "adults of God."³⁵ In adulthood and in our ministries, the "stuff of playing"—and the creative ability to live off-balance—

³⁴ Ibid., 64.

³⁵ Personal communication with an interviewee, Spring 2001.

includes a willingness to follow the way of loss, difficulty, and emotional hardship. In so doing, persons and communities may be able to “open their hearts” to the curiosity and abandon that is reminiscent of childhood, but which has been tested in the fire of life.

Winnicott poetically remarks that “the stuff of playing,” in the psychotherapeutic context, is the allowance for what he calls formless experience and creative impulses.³⁶ Creativity arises out of formless experience in the “unintegrated state of the personality” and must be reflected back to a person so that it becomes part of the organized personality. Winnicott’s clinical insight highlights the importance of play in the company of others, and especially in the presence of those who are able to observe, and reflect back, the creative impulses that emerge from formless experience. This has particular relevance for theological education. Educators can help to foster healthy misfits as they recognize, affirm, and draw out the budding creativity of students. Educators can also help to foster healthy misfits as they consistently emphasize, and teach others to enact, responsible restraint in the development of ministerial identity and practice so as to participate constructively and ethically in helping others through formless experience.

An example follows that illustrates how the psychodynamic theory and practice of play can be employed in our ministries. Dutch pastoral theologian Riet Bons-Storm uses the term “unstory” to refer to events or circumstances “that cannot be put into a self-narrative considered appropriate by the dominant belief system.”³⁷ These are stories that “cannot be told, and stay ‘unworded’ unless someone who understands and accepts these

³⁶ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 64.

³⁷ Riet Bons-Storm mentioned this term in a professional conversation with Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner. See Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, “Feminist Values from Seminary to Parish,” in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern, 221.

‘unwordable experiences’ can be found.”³⁸ Listening to the “unstory” asks ministers to listen for the silence before the speech—in those we care for, and I would add, in ourselves as well. Listening to the unstory means waiting with persons in the formless experience, staying with their experience over a long period of time. Misfit ministers are uniquely capacitated to listen for the unstory in others—the story that cannot be safely told because of its challenges to the dominant paradigm—because they themselves have struggled with experience and stories that do not fit.

Formless experience and creative impulses are also the stuff of our lives that can be so easily amenable to exploration of new ideas, to the investigation of new possibilities, to trial and error. This “area” of the personality is the internal playground, as it were, the “place” where the structured personality meets the unknown, which in the Christian tradition, is one “place” where the Holy often dwells. We must also proceed with caution because moving into this area of the personality can also be terrifying for some people, especially those unaccustomed to its terrain or those who have been harmed or abused. Ministers and educators can provide care to this “area” of the human personality when we do not press too quickly for answers to problems, clear statements to questions, or resolution to complex interpersonal issues. We trust that, in time, clarity usually emerges out of formless experience. There are also occurrences when clarity does not emerge. When in ministry with persons for whom clarity is not emerging, we might well place our best intentions for these persons within a larger frame of reference. That is, we may rely on a theological affirmation that the continual work of God moves toward the fullness of life for all persons. Educators may need to recognize that when clarity does not emerge out of formless experience there may be other issues to consider.

³⁸ Ibid.

These issues include underlying mental health concerns or disturbance, economic hardship, gender or racial discrimination, as well as problems in interpersonal or work relationships, among the many other possibilities.

The interactive dynamic of play is the “space” out of which our selfhood first arises. Winnicott’s theory demonstrates that our development as persons involves the interplay of what he calls True Self and False Self.

Selfhood

The True Self. The True Self emerges as a mother “meets the omnipotence of the infant and to some extent makes sense of it.”³⁹ By meeting the infant’s “omnipotent” gestures and expressions, the parent strengthens the infant’s weak ego.⁴⁰ In Winnicott’s theoretical formulation, the True Self develops, through the mother’s continued success in meeting the infant’s sensory hallucination or spontaneous gesture. The True Self exhibits spontaneity and does not emerge *ex nihilo*. Rather, it comes about through a specialized relationship with the mother that Winnicott calls “devotion.”⁴¹ To emphasize this point, Winnicott repeatedly uses the term “meet” to describe the act necessary to support the emergence and livelihood of the True Self. At this early stage, the infant begins “to enjoy the illusion of omnipotent creating and controlling, and then can gradually come to recognize the illusory element, the fact of playing and imagining.”⁴² The emergence and livelihood of the True Self requires certain conditions that are

³⁹ D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International University Press, 1965), 145.

⁴⁰ Winnicott uses the term “omnipotence” to refer to the infant’s experience of having control. For instance, when the infant makes a gesture and the caregiver responds, the infant has a sense of having performed the gesture herself. See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 47.

⁴¹ Winnicott, *Maturation Processes*, 148.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 146.

“associated with what is usually called creativity.”⁴³ In short, he argues that “in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.”⁴⁴ The infant needs a parent figure to “meet” [play] with expressions and gestures in order to foster the True Self. Then, in adulthood, as well as in other phases of development, the self is appropriately “discovered” in play. Yet, it is not as if we “find” or “discover” this self once only. Rather, Winnicott’s theory rightly conveys that play is the adventure toward the self, and a means to “locate” it in time and space. We play in order to meet others and ourselves. While this meeting with the True self might be fleeting and momentary, its effects are far-reaching.⁴⁵

The False Self. The False Self, Winnicott claims, has “one positive and very important function: to hide the True Self.”⁴⁶ Of course, there are degrees of the False Self, ranging from a healthy polite aspect of the self, to the split-off compliant False Self, which may be mistaken for the whole child.⁴⁷ Winnicott also notes that the True Self has a compliant aspect to it as well, thereby providing persons the means to participate in healthful living.⁴⁸ So, while the False Self provides us necessary protection in our social life—that is, to interact neither with too much caution or too much abandon—over-identification with the False Self in adulthood can leave persons feeling empty and bereft of genuine contact with themselves or others. The protective layer of the False Self can

⁴³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Play, as a means of searching for the self, has two corollary aspects according to Winnicott: first, the self is not to be found in products or constructs of the mind or body, regardless of impact, beauty, or skill; and second, new experiences are more valuable than mere explanations. Healthy misfits come to know themselves more fully in experience of creative play. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 55.

⁴⁶ Winnicott, *Maturation Processes*, 147.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

all too easily become a form of imprisonment. The False Self, nevertheless, plays a vital function in human development: it allows the child, and later the adult, to develop an adaptable social manner, which is a form of compromise for the person. This is one place in the theory that supports the value of conformity. The learned ability to adapt to social conventions and customs, and to follow and obey rules, allows us to live together with others in a generally harmonious common life.

The discussion of the True Self and False Self complicates our thinking about psychological vitality and well being. The purpose in cultivating misfits, from a psychological perspective, is not a simple matter of developing the True Self, and shedding the False Self, if such a process were even possible. Rather, at work psychologically is a delicate interplay of these two aspects of the psyche. Even as sacrifice and surrender remain significant themes in the Christian tradition, Winnicott's theory rings a cautionary note that one aspect of the self cannot be hastily disregarded supposedly in service to another. Both aspects of the self are needed; they are mutually complementary. Reverence for this internal process is necessary as a basic approach to relationships with all people, and especially with marginalized persons. Play can allow for the emergence of the True Self, more frequently, without denigrating the function of the False Self.

Negotiating Transitions

Holding and the Holding Environment. In Winnicott's theory, the term "holding" can refer to: (1) the actual physical relationship that the mother maintains with the infant, before the infant has a separate sense of self; and also (2) the "environmental provision"

of care.⁴⁹ While both aspects of Winnicott's concept are important here, I will highlight the environmental provision of care because of its particular relevance for extending Winnicott's theory into a psychology of adulthood that honors play. First, the physical aspect of holding protects from physiological insult, and keeps the infant from being harmed. This early experience of holding provides the infant with the experience of appropriate physical boundaries. Such experience, I would argue, influences the ability to negotiate ethical personal and professional boundaries later in life. The actual physical holding between caregiver and infant meets many of the infant's physiological needs. Just as important, Winnicott suggests, is the role of physical touch in regard to psychological growth and maturation. Winnicott points to the close connection between physiological needs and psychological needs at this stage in development. To care properly for the physiological needs is to care for psychological health.⁵⁰

Second, the significance of "holding" is most relevant for our purposes as it relates an extension of actual holding into the "environmental provision" of holding. The holding environment, as commonly referred to by Winnicott, functions to meet physiological needs and provide a reliable context for life. In the earliest stages of development, the holding environment also meets physiological needs. The infant needs reliable, yet not mechanical, care from the environment. The difference between reliable and mechanical care is differentiated as follows: in reliable care, the provider gives consistent and sustained attention to the needs of the infant, and allows for individual variances among infants; in mechanical care, the provider also may give consistent and

⁴⁹ See Winnicott, *Maturation Processes*, 43-46; and *Playing and Reality*, 141.

⁵⁰ Winnicott, *Maturation Processes*, 149.

sustained attention to the needs of the infant, but does so in a way that does not recognize the individual personality of a particular infant. It is through reliability that the mother communicates empathy to the infant. We can say that the environmental provision of holding is an extension of the relationship that the mother and infant have had since the prenatal stage of development. Holding—as a physical relationship and as an environmental provision—is the means by which caregivers communicate love to the infant.

This schema also offers opportunities and provisions for failure. Winnicott lays out an argument for what he calls “good-enough” parenting, whereby the infant has both its primary needs met and also grows and learns a sense of autonomy. In not meeting every need that the infant has when the infant has the capacity for self-care, the parent facilitates growth. This provides the space for the child to be excited by, and to excite, her/his environment. The purpose of parenting, in this view, is the facilitation of a caring context for the child, rather than perfection. The goal of perfection, Winnicott recognizes, is also not helpful to the growth of the human person. We can learn when our parents fail to meet all of our needs. We can learn when teachers fail to meet all of our expectations. We can learn and grow as seminarians and ministers when we make mistakes or attempt new endeavors that do not move in directions we expect. Thus, the concept of “good-enough” serves as touchstone for the theological education of religious misfits.

The role of the pastoral educator may be compared to that which Winnicott attributes to the mother in relation to the maturing infant: “power-assisted steering on a

motor-bus.”⁵¹ Winnicott outlines the constitutive elements that the primary caregiver needs to provide to the developing infant, which include: *continuity* of the environment which assists in the development of personality; *reliability* which makes the actions of caregivers predictable; *graduated adaptation* to the continually evolving needs of the child; and *beholding the creative impulse* (emphasis is Winnicott’s).⁵² Winnicott’s theory can be extended to adults because I have made use of this theoretical framework in educational contexts with seminarians. These qualities can serve to develop the “good-enough” context in which pastoral educators, like “power-assisted steering on a motor-bus,” cultivate thoughtful, lively, and creative ministers. These qualities also signal that the pastoral educator has a baseline responsibility for setting the tenor and tone for relationships in contexts of learning and for teaching others how to do this in their contexts of ministry.

Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena. Winnicott’s theory helps us to understand the work of making transitions and relating with objects during our lives. Winnicott observes that transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion.⁵³ The “object” represents the movement that the infant has with mother: from merging to being in relationship. Transitional objects for infants and children include the following: blankets, teddy bears, and thumbs. In time, an infant will de-cathect—withdraw energy from, and eventually outgrow, the connection—with a particular transitional object; nevertheless, the actual living and creating continues in a multiplicity of ways throughout the human lifespan. The ability to relate to symbols, and

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 14.

to engage in meaningful social, cultural, and religious life stems from this ongoing relationality between inner life and external reality. Winnicott does not provide an exhaustive list of transitional phenomena because his focus is on a theory that may be applicable across a wide range of human experience.⁵⁴ The theory points to the relevance of early play experience for establishing a psychological pattern for relating with ritual, symbols, and authority figures.

Paradox. The meaning of paradox follows directly from Winnicott's description of the transitional object. A paradox is that which cannot be finally resolved through mental calculation or deduction and needs to be "accepted and tolerated and respected."⁵⁵ There is no final resolution to human development and maturation; rather, there are more or less creative means to negotiate the on-going process of relating inner life to external reality. Play is one meaningful way we "inhabit paradox."⁵⁶

Paradox invites us to live simultaneously in the world of ambiguity, flexibility, and chaos as well as in the world of precision, accuracy, and order. The paradox of creative ministry is that one set of qualities cannot do without the other. Both sets of qualities contribute to the cultivation of misfit persons and communities who are compassionately *responsive* to human concerns and struggles as well as ethically *responsible* to established rules of professional conduct. Paradox may ultimately find its resolution not so much in rational and cogent thinking but more so in faithfully creative living. The Judeo-Christian tradition contains many paradoxical claims. Consider the following: "The one who loses her life will find it;" "The path is narrow and the way is

⁵⁴ Ibid., xii.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mary Rose O'Reilley, "Being Mindful When Your Mind is Already Too Full," public lecture delivered at Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, Calif., 1 March 2001.

difficult. . . ;” “In order to enter the realm of God, you must become like children.” We are invited to play in the paradox of faith.

Play and the Triangle of Creativity

A brief addendum and extension of play theory is warranted at this point.

Winnicottian concepts help us understand complex human development from an intrapsychic and interpersonal point of view. The theory, however, is less useful in illuminating play and creativity as an interaction of social systems. Here we turn to the work of Howard Gardner, a research psychologist and educator. Creativity, in Gardner's view, is “not an attribute of individuals but of social systems making judgments about individuals.”⁵⁷ A study of creativity, in short, must include study of the *context* of creativity.⁵⁸

Asynchrony

Gardner builds on a model that he calls the “triangle of creativity.” The “triangle” includes three components: the person, the domain, and the field. All three aspects are necessary in order to “investigate the dialectics among the *individual* person, or talent; the *domain* in which the individual is working; and the *field* of knowledgeable experts who evaluate works in the domain.”⁵⁹ Gardner observes that some “rapprochement” is necessary between these various contexts; otherwise there is no basis for evaluating a person's level of creativity. This theoretical framework highlights the notion that

⁵⁷ David Henry Feldman et al., *Changing the World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 144.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 143-55.

⁵⁹ Howard Gardner, *Creating Minds* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), xiii, 380. Theoretically, there exist six possible occasions of asynchrony: within the individual, within the domain, within the field; between individual and domain; between individual and field; and between domain and field.

creativity emerges in the complex interplay between persons, domains, and fields.⁶⁰ An adequate degree of flexibility and elasticity, which are arguably important components of the notion of play, are necessary within, and between, each of these realms in order to foster creativity.

Fruitful Asynchrony

Gardner argues that many creative persons benefit from what he calls "fruitful asynchrony" which he defines as an intermediate amount of tension among the "nodes" of the individual, the domain, and the field. The creative person is one with a marked "capacity to exploit, or profit from, an apparent *misfit* or *lack of smooth connections* within the triangle of creativity."⁶¹ Gardner contends that creative breakthroughs emerge at the "intersection" of the childlike and the mature.⁶²

Let us consider an example of asynchrony that will concretize this discussion. Again, "asynchrony" refers to "a lack of fit, an unusual pattern, or an irregularity that occurs within the creativity triangle."⁶³ This illustration, drawn from the life experience of a seminary mentor, Letty Russell, shows that misfits can help change domains. During her final year in seminary in the 1950s, Letty and another woman received the highest grades among the Divinity School class at Harvard. Since the school had never previously awarded highest honors to women, the faculty had an extended meeting to adjudicate the issue. The faculty members were concerned that a decision to grant the

⁶⁰Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is another psychologist who examines the notion of creativity as it emerges from the triangle of creativity. Csikszentmihalyi's work, based on interviews with highly successful persons in a number of fields, also references that a certain degree of marginality contributes to creativity. See *Creativity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 27-31, 176-78.

⁶¹Gardner, *Creating Minds*, 381.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 7.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 41.

women honors would “damage the self-image of the men.”⁶⁴ Fortunately, the faculty decided in favor of the women. The result of this misfit connection—the presence of high achieving women within the context of a male-dominated domain—made possible this situation of fruitful asynchrony.

The experience of asynchrony or “mis-fitting” provides the conditions that generate persons capable of creative expression in ministry. The theory also points out a caution, which has been noted in the dissertation: a degree of “fit” is necessary in order to allow for the conditions in which “mis-fitting” is useful and productive. The presence of those who stand at the margins of church communities provides creative tension that can enliven theological education.

The Challenge

This theory offers a larger challenge to the development of misfit ministers in theological education and the church in general: the fostering of what I am calling “*healthy misfits*” in ministry invites the cooperation and participation of many persons, including theological educators, pastors, parishioners, church executives, and seminarians. Creativity is fostered in the complex interaction—the interplay—within and between persons, domains, and fields. Together we contribute to, help change, and evaluate “the triangle of creativity” since we all participate—either wittingly or unwittingly—through our attitudes, beliefs, and decisions in the cultivation of creative contexts, and the recognition of creative persons, for pastoral ministry and leadership.

We have explored, in this chapter, the usefulness of psychological theory in the development of misfit ministers. We have examined the contribution that emotional well

⁶⁴ See Shannon J. Clarkson, “Translation, Education, and Liberation,” in *Liberating Eschatology*, ed. Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 8.

being brings to the psychospiritual lives of ministers. More particularly, we have explored the dynamic of grief, and its relation to play. This has allowed us to examine various dimensions of the process of grief. We have explored in detail the theoretical framework of D.W. Winnicott on play and the value it offers pastors and educators about the experience of living creatively in ministry.

Having considered key psychological components and perspectives necessary to sustain vital and creative psychic life in misfits, we turn to an examination of play as it contributes to creative leadership.

CHAPTER 4

Following the Leader as Creative Adventure

Leadership is both active and reflective. One has to alternate between participating and observing.

Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*

“Leadership” can mean many things, but surely it includes the ability to mobilize others in positive ways.

Laurent A. Parks et al., *Common Fire*

I learned a lesson about leadership early in my childhood. Together with the other neighborhood children, I would play the game “Follow the Leader.” On one occasion I was selected to be the leader. With a group of my friends lined up behind me, we prepared for a trek through the neighborhood. As I moved forward, I turned my head slightly so as to see behind my back, and in so doing, I walked directly into the edge of a huge piece of lumber, one of several planks that a resident used to support his boat. The incident left a gash in my forehead that required several stitches. The experience taught me a number of things about leadership. There is a high price for not paying attention to where one is going. One cannot always rely on other persons to point out the possible pitfalls in a course of action. It hurts to run into obstacles. What is more, leadership itself is a form of play that requires continual practice.

Creative leadership emerges from the complexity of human personhood. Creative leadership, as the childhood game of “Following the Leader” suggests, is adventuresome work. Unlike the childhood game, though, the playful nature of adult leadership is not nearly as simple as following the one in front. The kind of leadership to which I am referring draws on intellectual mastery as well as a honed capacity for creative and emotional intelligence as developed in Chapter 3. The development of the true and

authentic self often places persons in tension with the norms and expectations of their cultural environment.

This chapter builds on the assumption that competent leadership stems from the development of mature persons. Those who serve in the capacity of religious leadership need to be intimately acquainted with their own lives and equipped to assist others in the knowing, building up, and sharing of the life of faith. Effective leadership emerges from the unfolding awareness of the identity of those who exercise leadership, and from the ability to inspire, activate, or mobilize others in the life of faith. In this chapter, we examine the value of play to the fostering of creative leadership. We will explore the contextual and theoretical underpinnings for creative, playful leadership since one of the purposes of theological reflection and, I would add, of theological education in general, is to increase the capacity for imagination, intuition, speculation, and intellectual daring.¹

The argument in this chapter is divided into four sections: (1) A Theological Foundation for Leadership; (2) Movement toward Leadership as Adaptive Work; (3) Focusing our Leadership: The Contemporary Congregation; and (4) Misfit Leadership Practices that Support Religious Ritual. As a prelude to the discussion, I relate a story that shows my own initial resistance to, and increasing awareness of the need for, playful leadership in pastoral ministry.

I have learned much about playful leadership, its capacities and qualities, from my ministry with children. As a parish minister, I had the responsibility to give a children's sermon every week. Once I even attempted to persuade the church council that the children's sermon time was unnecessary, since it tended to put the children in the

¹ Robert L. Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 180.

spotlight. My own internal resistance to play, in part, prompted my interest in changing the procedure. But the Session members persisted, claiming that they learned as much from the children's sermons as from the "adult" sermons. I agreed to continue, and my initial resistance to play gave way to delight. Eventually I found myself looking around my office and home for props I could use in conveying stories and ideas to the children. I felt captivated by their presence and questions, and looked forward each week to the interaction we would share. I imagined that if I could not talk with the children about the message for the week, then I certainly had no idea what I would say to the adults.

The kind of leadership I am arguing for is this: persons who are capable of opening minds and hearts to the wonder of life so as to meet the challenges that contemporary religious communities face. It is adult leadership in that it recognizes and honors ambiguity. It is child-like leadership in that it never loses sight of amazing things. It becomes creative leadership when the two of these become as one. Oliver Wendell Holmes speaks to the matter: "For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I would not give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have."²

² Oliver Wendell Holmes, cited in James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 177.

A Theological Foundation for Leadership³

The unifying theme among the systematic theologians referenced in this dissertation, more specifically in this chapter and Chapter 5, is the notion of relationality, an emphasis on the interdependent nature of all creation—the web of relationships that connect persons, communities, and God. Into the theological worldview being constructed here, I introduce the thought of four classical theologians/theoreticians.

S-I-Z-E

A wide diversity of persons—in terms of aptitude for ministry and pastoral leadership—comprise the student body of any theological school. The importance of this issue notwithstanding, I want to move the conversation about “quality” of students in a somewhat different direction. Concomitant to the issue of “quality”—which seems to imply persons who fit a pre-established or preconceived standard—we also need to be concerned about the preparation and cultivation of what Bernard Loomer calls persons of “S-I-Z-E” or stature of soul.⁴

Loomer acknowledges that, after many years of service as a scholar and teacher, he has distilled his thinking to one basic principle. For Loomer, size is the fundamental category against which everything else is measured:

By size, I mean the stature of a person’s soul, the range and depth of his love, his capacity for relationships. I mean the volume of life you can take

³ Other scholars have attended to the theological grounding for pastoral leadership. For instance, Jackson Carroll’s work develops an ecclesiology for ministry in which he identifies “normative assumptions” that guide religious leaders. First, the church as the body of Christ is defined in “character and calling” by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A second assumption is that the church “functions as a community of meaning, belonging, and empowerment.” A third assumption is that the work of ministry is a form of service to which God calls all people, both clergy and laity. A fourth assumption is that shared ministry—among clergy and laity—does not “imply a sameness of functions.” And finally, Carroll proposes that shared ministry among clergy and laity contributes to, rather than distracts from, strong leadership. Jackson Carroll, *As One with Authority* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 79-96.

⁴ Bernard M. Loomer, “S-I-Z-E is the Measure,” 69-76.

into your being and still maintain your integrity and individuality, the intensity and variety of outlook you can entertain in the unity of your being without feeling defensive or insecure. I mean the strength of your spirit to encourage others to become freer in the development of their diversity and uniqueness. I mean the power to sustain more complex and enriching tensions. I mean the magnanimity of concern to provide conditions that enable others to increase in stature.⁵

While “size” may not be an easily measured outcome, it provides a compelling vision for the kind of leadership we seek to prepare. From my point of view, one long-term goal for theological education is to support the development of just this: stature of soul or size. Play can be a means to help build the soul of leaders and communities. Let us turn to an elaboration of this hypothesis.

In the experience of play—rather than in theorizing about it—we can move from the realm of possibilities into actuality. Process metaphysics emphasizes that the future holds boundless possibilities for creative action: the weight of the conditioned past which influences our habitual and repeated actions influences our choosing more of the same. In this metaphysical framework, the Divine being is related to all occasions of experience; through persuasion—the lure—God’s “intention” or initial aim becomes our “intention” in the subjective aim of experience. Each experience represents a concrescence, a coming together of past influences and future possibilities into the actuality of the present. Whitehead uses the word concrescence to mean that “the many become one and are increased by one.”⁶ The totality of who we are—our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and attitudes—together comprise all the information that will influence our choosing in the subsequent occasion of experience. Much of what

⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

influences our decision-making and action in the world may be outside conscious experience. Whitehead used the term “intermediate level of experience” to refer to experience that is not directly conscious, but nevertheless has an effect on us.

Loomer’s articulation of stature informs what I am arguing for with regard to playful religious leadership. Stature of soul is the heart of religious leadership. While there is not simply one means to develop this capacity, theological educators can contribute to its emergence. Soul is needed in this era because of the challenges that we face. An image from my own life highlights the scope of this challenge: in a dream I am walking toward the front of a church sanctuary—a grand and beautiful cathedral with stone walls, intricately-designed stained glass windows, and fine wood pews. Suddenly the walls of this beautiful structure begin to collapse inward. Amidst the dust and rubble, the foundation of the structure remains. Given this dream image, I asked myself what, in my own soul, was still standing or holding firm in spite of the crumbling structure? This paradoxical image invites reflection. In the dream, I stayed inside the crumbling structure because I felt captivated by its beauty. I stand as a minister member of the Christian church even as I recognize elements that I think need attention and transformation. I imagine that living and offering leadership in unsettled times, conveyed in the dream image as the walls collapsing, may not be easy for many people. Nevertheless, I think that during this era soulful leadership is needed all the more.

Play can contribute, in a number of ways, to an increase in stature. First, play can help a player embrace the immediacy of the present—how relationships and situations are in the present—and fashion a new reality. In playing, persons relate intimately to present experience. Persons of stature know that the “means” and “ends” of bringing

about a more just and equitable world are also connected. Play holds together our concerns for process as well as content; in this way, it can contribute to the development of a broad range of interests and capacity which is a mark of stature. Second, play can allow for the imaginative to become actualized even if only for a brief period. Even these hints and glimpses of experiencing reality in a different way introduce new and previously unimagined possibilities. Third, play can be a means to develop leadership that builds on other forms of intelligence that would not be addressed by other avenues. Play does not require brilliance as a starting point, but rather a willingness to engage from the place where one is located. While the development of stature comes in time—perhaps a very long time—I see no reason to abandon it as an overarching purpose for spiritual leadership. Fourth, play can be a means to heighten awareness and to alert our senses. In this way, play can contribute to the multi-dimensional work of religious ministry. Fifth, play can shift our perspective away from an externally defined notion of success and re-orient our attention to serendipitous opportunities of soul. Thus, play encourages our passions and loves, arguably constituent elements of the soul's realm. Frederick Buechner suggests that vocation—our call to fulfilling livelihood in the world—emerges at the intersection of the world's deep hunger and our most passionate motivation.⁷ Since our passions and loves are discovered over time, play is one means to awaken them, thereby bringing persons into closer touch with themselves and their environment. Finally, play can increase stature by supporting persons to take risks they might not otherwise take. When persons take risks—venturing into unknown territory on

⁷ This is a paraphrased quote of Frederick Buechner, which I have committed to memory.

behalf of creating and contributing something of value to the community—failure is one possible result. Yet, even our so-called failures can contribute to soul making.

James Fowler, a practical theologian, argues that we need the development of a leadership group capable of engaging questions of ultimacy within the context of our common life: these leaders need to be capable of “altering environments of debate and dialogue.”⁸ This kind of leadership can emerge best under the conditions that Fowler outlines for the Conjunctive stage of faith, which is the stage in faith development in which persons understand, for instance, that notions of reality are constructed and that the Divine reality exceeds any constructions we might make.

James MacGregor Burns, a prominent scholar on leadership theory, first made the distinction between transactional and transforming leadership. Transactional leadership exchanges “one thing for another” while transformational leadership “occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”⁹ James Fowler and Bernard Loomer both offer compelling visions of what is needed for transformative leadership. My vision of creative religious leaders builds on the work of these theorists.

An Analysis of Power

We consider an analysis of power with a theological worldview that values play. An elaboration of power that emerges from Loomer’s process relational world-view continues the discussion. Loomer differentiates between two different types of power: (1) unilateral power—which is defined as “the capacity to influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control, or transform the human or natural environment in order to

⁸ See esp. Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 177.

⁹ See James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 4.

advance one's own purposes."¹⁰ and (2) relational power—which is defined as “the capacity to influence others and to be influenced by others.”¹¹ Unilateral power is our ability to have an effect in our environment, the ability to make something happen. Loomer rightly names this “unilateral power” because it recognizes movement in one direction: from the actor to those persons or things that are acted upon. Unilateral power focuses primarily upon the individual and his/her goals in the world, and does not consider the mutual interaction of other persons and communities. Unilateral power has little regard for the benefit or well being of the other. Loomer maintains that persons, institutions, and communities who exercise this type of power are primarily concerned with securing their own ends. Rather than enlarging the freedom of the other, this form of power constricts. Unilateral power is Loomer's terminology for what others have called “hierarchical power” or “patriarchal power,”¹² and what the Greek New Testament writers referred to as *katakuriro* (the power to become master over someone or something).

Relational power, on the other hand, entails the ability to give and to receive, to affect others and to be affected by them. Relational power emerges in, and for the benefit of, relationship. Persons who exercise relational power participate in self-creation and the creation of the other. This form of power entails our ability to influence and to be influenced. Loomer contends that persons who exercise relational power are larger in stature than those who exercise unilateral power because this type of relationality allows for incorporating within one's personhood the give and take of relationship.

¹⁰ Bernard M. Loomer, “Two Kinds of Power,” *Criterion* 15 (Winter 1976): 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹² Brock, *Journeys by Heart*.

Unilateral power signifies that someone stands in the dependent position.

Relational power, in contrast, emphasizes interdependence and mutuality. To the extent that we engage in relational power, possibilities for creative transformation can emerge within ourselves, and in relationship with others. Relational power is the capacity to establish and sustain complex relations within one's self and with others: that is, our ability to sustain the conditions of complexity and ambiguity which, arguably, can also be developed in play.

Loomer's descriptive analysis of power is of value with regard to play and creative leadership, the topic under consideration in this chapter. The exercise of power in human relationships, as Loomer's analysis shows, is not benign. Neither is play benign when exercised among persons when there is a difference in personal, social, cultural, or institutional power. When play is used to tease, belittle, denigrate, or diminish persons, then this is not, in fact, the exercise of creative play, but rather destructive relationality reflective of the *unhealthy misfit*. The exercise of human agency can both serve the flourishing of life as well as the destruction of life. Of course, Loomer recognizes, and I emphasize, that the delineation of two types of power is a simplification of reality. Rarely, if ever, are the choices we face in exercising our power that easily defined. In most cases, the play we exercise is embedded in a complex interweave of motives, impulses, hopes, and wants. Religious leaders are entrusted with the responsible use of power, the dynamic that the New Testament refers to as *eksousia* (the power that enhances the freedom of choice and capability) and serves to bring about *dunamis* (making space for the power of God to emerge). Relational power—grounded in the

Christian religious tradition and embodied in human persons—is what playful leadership seeks to exercise.

Serendipitous Creativity

Gordon Kaufman's conception of God as Serendipitous Creativity¹³ emphasizes the creative nature of the Divine reality in a theology of play. This discussion of creative, playful leadership builds from this provocative theological conception of the nature of God and, by correlation, of the nature of human beings in relation to God and one another. Kaufman's theological vision takes into account a relational, organic, interdependent worldview. Moreover, this theological vision of God as "Serendipitous Creativity" suggests that human beings are also created within the context of, and for the purposes of, a relationality that is inherently creative and serendipitous. In this vision, human persons are not conceived of as "children" of a "parental God" but as creative and responsive beings, capacitated with unique responsibilities, for growing awareness and participation in the "magnificent intricate web of life on earth."¹⁴

Further clarification of "Serendipitous Creativity" is necessary especially as used in relation to the Divine being. Kaufman argues against the conception of God as "*personal* reality existing somehow before and independent of what we today call 'the universe,'"¹⁵ and asserts instead that creativity is conceived of as the "coming into being through time of the previously nonexistent, the new, the novel."¹⁶ Kaufman acknowledges that creativity may take a destructive trajectory.¹⁷ Creativity needs to be

¹³ Gordon D. Kaufman, "On Thinking of God," 409-25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 423.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 410.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 411.

¹⁷ From a process-relational viewpoint, Marjorie Suchocki argues that to be human necessarily makes us participants in conditions that contribute to "ill-being" or "well-being." See Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

qualified and nuanced in order to serve as an appropriate way to speak of human activity. Aware of the possible destructive capacity of human creativity, we need to direct our efforts in ways that lead to the healing of persons and communities, and toward the resolution of conflicts and problems.

Kaufman identifies several reasons for employing the metaphor of creativity to name divine life: the terminology underscores that mystery is the heart of Divine nature, and that God's being is ultimately connected with "the new and the novel."¹⁸ While the conception of God as "serendipitous creativity" challenges traditional Christian thinking, it also preserves important theological components. Specifically, the notion of serendipitous creativity maintains a "decisive qualitative distinction" between God and the created order. This distinction provides the "basis for regarding God as the sole appropriate focus for human devotion and worship, as that alone that can properly orient us in the world."¹⁹ The second point follows from the first. In this conceptual scenario, human beings are part of the complex order of creation, and not the pinnacle of creation. We are, however, uniquely capacitated to appreciate the serendipitous nature of creativity, and to take delight in, and to be surprised by, the movement of reality that gives rise to our lives. Such a vision, however, does not free misfit ministers from responsible stewardship of personal and communal resources, and adherence to ethical standards. We can lead the people of God to respond more creatively and more faithfully to a Serendipitous God only in so far as we are also willing and able to conduct ourselves with an appropriate level of decorum fitting of professional leaders and caregivers. A

¹⁸ Kaufman, "On Thinking of God," 411.

¹⁹ Ibid., 423.

theology of play should not be construed to support in any way clergy sexual misconduct or the misuse of financial or material resources.

Creative Propositions

Imaginative propositions emerge from a process-relational worldview that values play. In Whiteheadian language, a proposition is a lure “to creative emergence in the transcendent future.”²⁰ A proposition makes the connection between a fact and a possibility. By extension, propositional language—if it is to stir the soul—needs to help persons make connections between their present reality and the possible future. The use of this kind of language can be a means to direct affect and intellect toward imagining new possibilities for the future. Propositions employed in a religious context, thus, invite people to see, hear, think, and live in new ways. Further, the important aspect of a proposition is not necessarily whether it is true or not, but whether it is compelling and attractive to lure us to more creative and imaginative living. Whitehead puts it this way: “It is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true.”²¹

Neither the generation of interesting propositions, nor the cultivation of the environment that fosters the development of creative propositions, is an easy task. One central task for creative pastoral leadership, though, is to be able to present others with choices and possibilities for faithful and imaginative living. This can be conveyed through propositional or suggestive means. So, if exercising leadership is like taking a walk in the wilderness with a group of people, the leader is the one who points out aspects of the environment for others to observe and behold. “Look at that waterfall. . .

²⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 263.

²¹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 313.

its primary water source is . . .” or “Notice the different types of stone and granite. . .”

Propositional leadership would not, to my mind, focus attention on only one aspect of the environment. By the same token, the leader may serve as guide even if s/he is not an expert on the entire environment.

My vision of religious leadership, informed by the theological worldview and theoretical grounds explored above, also relies on other literature. Some of this literature is explicitly related to ministry in the church while other literature outside the field is relevant to the topic of leadership within the church. An examination of that literature follows.

Leadership as Adaptive Work

I have argued that the purpose of developing misfit ministers is not to encourage persons to adapt—to assimilate or to accommodate—to environmental conditions, relationships, or institutional situations that may be both unhealthy for themselves and for the communities they serve. By “adaptive,” Ronald Heifetz means the ability to address the tension that emerges between the values that people hold and the ways in which those values may or may not be embodied in personal and corporate actions. This meaning of adaptive work is consonant with what I mean by the ethical relationality of misfit ministers.

Jackson Carroll, a church sociologist, has explored the historical and sociological forces that have precipitated what he calls a crisis of authority in ministry.²² Carroll outlines four challenges to clergy authority and leadership in this era that influence both the need for, and challenges to, adaptive and playful leadership.²³

²² Carroll, *As One with Authority*.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

First, in the postmodern era, assumptions about our religious beliefs are “called into question” by the interaction with other religious traditions and belief systems. Second, the marginalization or “shift in the social location of the church from the center to the periphery” has meant, among other things, that ministry is not considered a viable option for college students. Third, the voluntary character of religious life in the United States affects the authority and exercise of leadership. Carroll acknowledges that voluntarism has been a distinctive quality of American religion for centuries. Further, there exists in this era the phenomenon of persons seeking self-fulfillment. Since persons have a great deal of flexibility in pursuing religious matters, this casts members of the clergy the role of service providers. Fourth, the emphasis on egalitarianism and shared ministry has, even for those clergy who enthusiastically adhere to this perspective, led to some confusion. Some members of the clergy wonder what their distinct contribution may be, given a collaborative configuration of ministry. Other ministers, Carroll says, may be frustrated when they assume a shared ministry perspective and members of congregations expect them to be the experts.²⁴

The challenges that confront religious leadership, as Carroll’s analysis points out, are embedded within larger sociological forces. Carroll’s presses us to see that the influence of contemporary culture finds its way inside the church. In one sense, the work of ministry is itself a misfit in contemporary culture. Especially amidst the challenges of the times, creative and playful leadership is needed. We turn to a model that assists misfit ministers in providing leadership.

²⁴ Ibid., 19-33.

Ronald Heifetz, a psychiatrist by training, teaches leadership theory at the Harvard Business School. Heifetz argues for a method of leadership as adaptive work.²⁵ This conception of leadership informs the kind of activity I am endorsing for creative, playful leadership. First we turn to a prefatory remark about leadership.

Heifetz avoids using the term “leader.” Heifetz prefers the active phrase “exercising leadership”²⁶ because it connotes a sense of engagement and stimulation. Leadership, in his view, is not only defined in relation to authority figures, but also those persons who exercise leadership qualities among the so-called rank and file members of any organization. Further, he claims that the dualism “leader-follower” is a flawed designation because it conveys a sense that one person is actively engaged while another is simply passively responsive. The term “follower” does not adequately speak to how it feels to be in the presence of someone who is exercising leadership. Heifetz suggests that persons tend to feel stimulated and inspired to become engaged in some work or action.

Here we turn to an explication of what Heifetz suggests in regard to leadership as “adaptive work.”²⁷ This model of leadership is supported by the author’s study of the processes of evolutionary biology.²⁸ Heifetz acknowledges that human communities and cultures change in ways both similar to, and different from, evolutionary biology.

Leadership as adaptive work is defined as follows:

Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior. The exposure and orchestration of conflict—internal

²⁵ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

contradictions—within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn in new ways.²⁹

This model of leadership as adaptive work presents both support and challenge to the cultivation of religious leadership.

One of the strengths of Heifetz' theory is his argument that leadership may be exercised by any person in a community or organization, not necessarily those who hold positions of authority or those who have a systemically designated constellation of personal characteristics. Heifetz distinguishes between what he calls leadership with authority and leadership without authority.³⁰ Leadership with authority refers to the exercise of legitimate, ethical power and responsibility within a defined role in service to the fulfillment of an organization's goals. Leadership without authority refers to the exercise of responsible, ethical power and voice in an attempt to fulfill the goals of an organization or movement. Those who exercise leadership without authority, according to Heifetz, are often "perceived as entrepreneurs and deviants, organizers and troublemakers," those with the capacity to see the weaknesses of the "dominant viewpoint."³¹ In my view, it is important for theological education to train seminarians as those who will exercise leadership *with* authority to recognize the value and contributions of those who lead *without* authority because of the possible benefit that they may bring to the community. This theory can be adopted for pastoral ministry with a revision. In one sense, all members of a religious community (here I am speaking primarily of Christian congregations) have the authority as baptized persons to exercise leadership within the

²⁹ Ibid., 22.

³⁰ For an extended discussion of leadership with authority, see Heifetz, 67-180. An elaboration on leadership without authority can be found in Heifetz, 183-231.

³¹ Ibid., 183.

community, and therefore, can be considered those who lead with authority. While recognizing that all members exercise leadership with authority to some degree, I also submit that ordained ministers often are the ones vested with particular ethical responsibility for the faithful care of the entire community. In this professional capacity, ministers can exercise leadership with authority so as to support the leadership without authority of the entire community.

Further, Heifetz distinguishes between technical and adaptive situations. A technical situation is a state of affairs for which there is usually a predetermined response. An adaptive situation is a state of affairs for which multiple and complex responses are required. Authoritative leadership in adaptive situations, Heifetz argues, requires persons to behave differently than one might expect. Heifetz offers a means for exercise leadership in adaptive situations. Leaders can be most effective in adaptive situations as they engage the following strategies: (1) identify the adaptive challenge—the focus here is on a proper diagnosis of the situation and the nexus of connected issues (2) keep the level of distress within a tolerable range for doing adaptive work—the assumption is that some level of tension is healthful for persons and systems to engage in useful work; (3) focus attention on ripening issues and not on stress-reducing distractions—the purpose here is to identify issues that deserve attention; (4) give the work back to the people, but at a rate they can stand—this requires that persons in leadership know when and how frequently work needs to be delegated; and (5) protect voices of leadership without authority—the assumption is that those who ask “hard

questions” and give expression to contradictions have an important contribution to make.³²

Heifetz argues that effective leadership in adaptive situations needs to move “against the grain,” for example, by posing questions rather than always fulfilling expectations, and challenging norms instead of maintaining them.³³ It requires, in short, that leaders walk “on the razor’s edge.” By this, Heifetz argues that the exercise of adaptive leadership requires the keen ability for balancing between two extremes: on one side, challenge people too quickly or press them too hard and they are likely to accuse the person in authority of failing to meet their needs for stability and constancy; on the other side, challenge people too slowly and they might blame the person in authority for making no progress. As the phrase suggests, those who exercise authority will eventually experience the pain of getting cut. In the same way, those who exercise playful and creative leadership may be just as likely as other ministers to experience difficult challenges in the ministry. Heifetz assists ministers to value framing our work and leadership in terms of positioning ourselves to meet the next challenge, not in terms of guarding the status quo. Playful leadership, like adaptive work, places the emphasis on developing the capacity and means to respond to, and initiate change, on behalf of enriching the morale and mission of a community.

The exercise of principled and authoritative leadership requires one important condition that we have already explored: a holding environment.³⁴ Heifetz builds on this notion developed in the psychoanalytic literature, most notably in the theory of D.W.

³² Heifetz, *Leadership*, 128.

³³ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

Winnicott. Moreover, Heifetz argues that persons with formal or informal authority contribute to the formation and on-going health of the holding environment.³⁵

Remember, in Winnicott's conceptualization, the holding environment—the way that the infant is touched and in every way cared for by the caregiver—provides a context for the emergence in the infant of trust in self and environment. Similarly, in ministry, we need pastoral leaders who can support the adaptive work of persons and communities by creating contexts of trust. A reliable holding environment allows for the child to grow and develop without threat and harm. The holding environment provides the space for experimentation—for journeying, falling, testing, and standing on one's own. This is precisely the kind of context, in a religious community, which can allow persons the room they might need for exploration of faith life.

Finally, Heifetz' central argument is focused on the development of what he calls the "short-run task" of meeting the "adaptive challenge."³⁶ By this, Heifetz provides a framework for helping persons to meet problems in their current environment. The "long-term task" of leadership is what he calls "developing adaptive capacity."³⁷ My main focus in this dissertation relates to the development of adaptive capacity, which can be nurtured in the context of play. Religious leaders need to be equipped with "short-term" strategy and the "long-term" capacity both to effect change and to be affected by it. Leadership development in the context of theological education, I am arguing, bears partial responsibility for taking the long-term view toward leadership development, while not abandoning the responsibility to prepare persons with much-needed skills.

³⁵ Ibid., 104.

³⁶ Ibid., 129.

³⁷ Ibid.

Focusing our Leadership: The Contemporary Congregation

Preparation of congregational leaders, while not the sole task, comprises a significant aspect of the mission of a theological school. As a means to bring sharpened focus to the discussion about how play enhances creativity in pastoral leadership, we will explore some of the issues facing contemporary congregations—how they are undergoing change; and what is needed for the leadership of these communities. In this discussion, I rely on the sociological work of Nancy Ammerman and associates who have conducted research on twenty-three congregations: eighteen focus congregations as well as five smaller, struggling congregations.³⁸ *In this discussion, we see that healthy misfit congregations and leaders are those that adapt creatively to change.*

The study provides an empirical backdrop of the complexity of congregations and how they respond to internal as well as environmental challenges. The study gives flesh to organizational theory which suggests that there are four broad patterns of response to change: congregations decline (although they may survive for a relatively long time depending on their resources); congregations re-orient to their own particular locale (some move locations while others establish identities beyond the particular locale, thereby becoming “niche” communities); congregations adapt (the authors argue that this occurs in several ways—attract new constituencies, change practices and culture, polity changes); and some congregations develop “survival of the savvy” (this strategy involves the mobilization of power in the community, and the effective use of internal coalitions).³⁹ All the congregations studied are undergoing unsettled times, and as such,

³⁸ Ammerman et al., *Congregation and Community*, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43–46.

they need “new strategies for action, using the cultural tool kits of ideas and practices available to them.”⁴⁰

As a pastoral theologian concerned with the preparation of future leaders, my purpose is to consider options available to build on one significant aspect of the church’s capital—those who are called to exercise leadership in the congregational setting. The aforementioned typology maps the wide array of community contexts for which ordained leaders need to prepare. The number of challenges and particularities of each type of community undergoing change is, undoubtedly, as large as the number of communities in existence. Given the vast complexity of the terrain, it is outside the scope of this writing to consider all the variables and contingencies inherent in guiding/leading any given community. It is necessary, however, to articulate how play as adaptive variability contributes to the development of one key resource: pastoral leadership.

Ammerman and associates identify the qualities that congregations need in their leaders. Congregations need clergy qualified to envision possibilities and elicit motivation from congregants to participate in accomplishing the task of adapting to change: they need leaders to work with groups of people to make corporate decisions, and to attend to numerous details while also “getting a large job done;” they need leaders to establish significant emotional connections with people, and provide members with a simultaneous sense of “things are under control” and “everyone has a say.”⁴¹ Play can equip ministers for work in these contexts by supporting the development of flexibility, emotional connectivity, and the creation of mutuality in interpersonal relationships.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

Ministerial leaders, to be sure, need to be competent generalists in an age of specialists. Play, however, may be less well suited to prepare persons to attend to the many details required for the leadership and management of congregational life.

While the study notes the importance of lay leadership in these congregations, it also finds pastors to be the “critical players in the process of change.”⁴² The authors find that, in largely voluntary organizations, human resources are key for imagining and implementing possibilities for change. This is especially true of communities in the process of adapting to internal or environmental changes. Jackson Carroll claims that the work of leadership is shaped primarily as the “activity of the pastor” which focuses the work of the congregation. Ammerman concludes that the personality of the pastor and the activity in which she/he engages are both important and cites several examples, two of which follow. In one context, the charisma and skills of Pastor Mary Ellen Kilsby are instrumental in shaping the church community to welcome actively the growing lesbian and gay constituency in Long Beach, California. In another context, Pastor Jackson of Hope Baptist in Atlanta initiated “dynamic worship, new decision-making structures, and innovative ministries.”⁴³ Clergy are making a difference in these communities through the responsible use of their personalities to invite persons into ministry and also through the exercise of leadership skills.

With regard to so-called status quo congregations, Ammerman’s comprehensive study suggests that pastors in these congregations provided excellent care, but tended not to introduce new programs or ideas. The reasons for this also varied. Some pastors fit well in a particular church culture and were content to maintain community life and fulfill

⁴² Ibid., 326.

⁴³ Ibid.

the well-defined expectations of the congregation. Those who did see need for change was either unable or unwilling to initiate it.⁴⁴ Some pastors expressed that they did not possess the skills necessary to help the congregation.

Declining congregations, while they rely heavily on strong lay leadership, can also be harsh on pastoral leadership that intimates or implements any sort of change.⁴⁵ These communities seem to have a high level of commitment from the rather small memberships that they do manage to maintain. It is unclear to me whether or how these communities would benefit from pastoral leadership that values creativity: playful misfits might simply be frustrated in these settings. Yet, theological educators can help prepare ministers for service in declining congregations, with attention given to the particular challenges that confront these communities and their leaders.

Communities and congregations that are in the process of adaptation, in my view, offer promising contexts for the creative and playful leadership of religious misfits. In these contexts, congregation and community members may be open to reflect on core commitments. They may be willing and enthusiastic to reconsider and reconfigure patterns for life and mission. Status quo communities also need creative leaders who can help initiate new ideas and practices. Adapting congregations, though, may provide the contexts most ready to receive the gifts of the playful misfits.

Congregations open to adaptive change may themselves be considered misfit congregations. A misfit congregation navigates between conformity and idiosyncrasy to discern its particular vocation in the world. For example, when I served as a pastor of a re-developing congregation with a large number of elderly persons, the question

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

frequently came up as to why we did not have a senior ministry program. This question arose in spite of the fact that another congregation within close proximity had a senior ministry program in which many of our members participated. Our church—in consultation with the church leaders and members of the congregation—had identified its ministry with children in the community and a health ministries program. Misfit congregations need not try to be something other than they are, nor pretend to offer what they cannot offer. But they can partner with other churches in the community to engage in collaborative ministries. A community partnership of misfit congregations can serve as a powerful witness.

Play, thus, can offer a viable option for cultivating an essential attitude, mood, and pattern of life within leaders themselves and also within contemporary congregations undergoing change. Now, we turn to analysis of playful practices that can support misfit leaders in the development of a primary function of religious leadership: fostering creative ritual.

Misfit Leadership Practices that Support Religious Ritual

Religious leaders—whether they are misfits themselves, serve misfit communities or both—bear the responsibility for the support of meaningful ritual. Ritual is especially important for communities undergoing change because it offers psychic and symbolic stability. Meaningful rituals are one means by which religious leaders, most directly, participate in the life of what Kaufman calls Serendipitous Creativity. *Healthy misfits are persons and communities capable of participating in these potentially life-giving and innovative practices.*

Imaginative rituals stem from our ability to respond adaptively—to interact relationally and creatively—in our ministries. In the Christian tradition, the ritual of worship holds a central and important place. We care for worship because it matters in the life of faith. There are many other rituals, such as baptism, marriage, funeral rites, anointing, and healing that also require the attentive care of ministers. In the context of meaningful ritual, we can anticipate and experience our own possibilities for living creative and transformed lives. In the context of worship, for example, the minister as preacher may be able to make the gospel message “come alive” for people to the extent that she presents interesting, provocative, and compelling propositions to congregants. Here I need to emphasize that these propositions are not sentences articulated to the congregation. Creative propositions are connections between present reality and the possible future. This form of persuasion moves largely by way of inspiration—calling persons to live complex, creative lives—in response to the message. The Whiteheadian notion of creative propositions can be embodied in ministry in at least two ways: by employing language to lure the intellect and the imagination of persons from the present reality to creative possibilities in the future, and also by establishing contexts and rituals whereby persons may encounter these creative propositions.

Creative propositions, from a pastoral theological viewpoint, need to become embodied in our very beings as misfit ministers and pastors. In the embodiment of creativity, though, we must also be careful to respect professional boundaries since novel expression of ideas and emotions can be off-putting for some persons. Also, creative propositions should not be construed to endorse manipulative, self-aggrandizing, or sexually inappropriate behavior.

The purpose of misfit leadership practices is to enable ministers to care for ritual. My focus is on the means to develop leaders who care for ritual. Playful practices can enliven the spirits of misfit leaders. Therefore, theological educators can contribute to the “deepening of the faith life”⁴⁶ for misfit seminarians, and in turn, for members of religious communities, by fostering and supporting practices that may help to restore or to affirm the vitality of religious leadership.

We turn to a brief examination of the theory of Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologist, in order to articulate the function of ritual experience. Turner’s work provides a theoretical underpinning for how ritual, while a highly scripted form of play, functions as a practice to bridge experience between the known and unknown.

As we explored in Chapter 3, creativity in psychic life arises from the complex interplay between self and the outside world, as well as between personal experience and the demands/requirements of the domain and the field. The means to cultivate vitality, from a psychological perspective, is not ultimately the way of either conformity or idiosyncrasy, but a complex and, at times, ambiguous relationality between the two poles. Religious rituals also serve as a context for the complex interplay between the “reality” of the way the world is in tension with a “vision” for what it could be. Ritual can serve as transitional space, between the “what is” and the “could be.”

Victor Turner defines ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers.”⁴⁷ Ritual, from Turner’s perspective, does not simply “rehearse the problems of everyday life” but rather serves several important functions such as redressive activity, a

⁴⁶ Carroll, 102.

⁴⁷ Bobby C. Alexander, *Victor Turner Revisited* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 2.

means for social change, and means for creating new social relationships. Turner conceives of ritual as “anti-structure,” meaning that ritual is a response to the “divisiveness, alienation, and exploitation” that often accompanies social structure.⁴⁸ Ritual can serve a healing and transformational function, especially for marginalized persons and communities who bear the wounds of unilateral power, by creating an alternative form of relationality.

Further, Turner explores the experience of liminality: it refers to the “state” of being in-between customarily defined roles or stages in life. Turner defines liminal as follows: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there: they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”⁴⁹ The experience of actual living in the liminal space can be highly ambiguous because this transitional realm often has few characteristics of the previous realm or next state.⁵⁰ Because traversing the liminal space can be a psychologically disorienting experience, ritual can serve a vital stabilizing function. The liminal can also be referred to as the “fuzzy middle ground of transition.”⁵¹ Congregations undergoing change stand on that transitional middle ground. Moreover, transformative ritual supports the experience of *communitas*—an egalitarian and non-hierarchical form of interpersonal and group relations.⁵² Since living in the liminal realm can be inherently disorienting, then the growth of *communitas* ensures stability and reassurance. Misfit ministers, as persons

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 95.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁵¹ Ramshaw, 42.

⁵² Turner, *Ritual Process*, 96-97.

who are intimately acquainted with life in the transitional realm, are uniquely capacitated to care for the ritual of communities undergoing change.

Now, let us examine misfit leadership practices that support ministers in providing creative religious ritual for communities. These ideas and practices have emerged from my own educational and pastoral experience, and are based on the theory we have already explored in this chapter.

Venturing Out and Returning Back

Transformative leaders are persons who travel beyond their own personal and cultural boundaries in order to explore and understand other people, and to return home with new insights and stories. This form of venturing out and returning home is what several authors refer to as “a good pilgrimage.”⁵³ The movement involved in a pilgrimage is similar to that which Gadamer describes as the to-and-fro movement inherent in play.⁵⁴ Pilgrimage, as a means of going out to experience and returning “home” to tell the story about the experience, whatever it may have entailed, is an aspect of play itself.

A personal story of pilgrimage—of venturing out and returning home—illustrates the importance of this practice to pastoral leadership.

I met Annie when I was a pastor of a parish in rural Upstate New York. As the manager of the Organic Foods market in Oneonta, she sat behind the counter, at the back of the store, and greeted everyone. Annie assisted customers, stocked shelves, labeled packages, and tallied charges. Often, she made helpful suggestions on products to

⁵³ See Parks et al., *Common Fire*, 38. The authors suggest that “a good pilgrimage leads to discovery and transformation, but isn’t complete until you have returned home and told your story.”

⁵⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

purchase, not based on making the big sale but to match a customer's needs. Annie herself walked with a limp, because one leg was shorter than the other. The success of this small business depended, in no small measure, on Annie's care-filled assistance in helping persons with the "incidentals" of their livelihood—buying toothpaste, deciding between the quality of packaged and bulk cereal, weighing the benefits of certain kinds of vitamins.

In anticipation of a Christmas Eve baptism, the church's governing body informed me that the previous minister, in addition to the administration of the sacrament of baptism, anointed babies with frankincense and myrrh. They wanted the practice to continue. Not knowing where to turn, I initially ventured to the local Christian bookstore to inquire about buying the oil. The woman in the shop graciously, yet firmly, said that they did not carry *that* sort of thing. I asked for any ideas she might have as to where I might find these oils. The bookstore clerk suggested I try the health food store down the block.

So, I went to see Annie. When she heard what I was looking for, she laughed through her words. "You mean you don't have a Presbyterian supply shop for that sort of thing?" Even though the health food store did not stock these oils, Annie had an idea. She reached for the telephone and made a call. Annie finished with the call and asked if I would be comfortable going to a New Age shop to get the oils. I responded that the prospect suited me well as long as she did not tell the congregation where I got them. I went and purchased the oils. The baptismal ritual that Christmas Eve was a meaningful ritual, and people commented that the little one smelled so good.

This story reflects the leadership skills that misfits need to develop: searching outside the usually defined boundaries, finding needed resources, incorporating the insights and resources into the ministry, and reflecting on the experience for the future. This pastoral practice enabled me to provide the kind of pastoral leadership that was needed, and indeed required, by this congregation. The significance of the lessons from the story can be easily over-looked if we fail to see that the creative practices that enable effective pastoral leadership are not necessarily only related to the rituals themselves, as important as they are, but also the creative practices that inform the rituals. The way we practice playing in ministry, I am arguing, contributes to our ability to play creatively with the rituals of the church.

Theological education can help provide a context for preparing ministers for this kind of practice. One of the most powerful forms of learning in my theological education came from the theological traveling seminars in which I participated. In conjunction with a course on African liberation theology, I traveled with the professor and a group of students to South Africa, where we met with religious leaders and others to learn directly about the challenges in the church and the culture. The experience of the traveling seminar illustrates the value of formative play. We move beyond established boundaries of the classroom and patterned relationships in a given culture in order to see and understand in new ways. We locate theological resources and insights for ministry from one context that relate to another. We, then, reflect theologically on ways that the practice informs the rituals of our ministry. The practice embedded in this “macroscopic” example mirrors what can be engaged in our everyday ministerial practice.

Asking the Impertinent Question

Learning to ask the impertinent question is another ministerial practice that contributes to the creative ritual life of persons and religious communities. The impertinent question, essentially, is a question that seems to arise in the minds of many, given a course of events or set of circumstances. The impertinent question is the one that many persons may consider rude or intrusive, but also has the possibility for opening possibilities that have not been considered previously. Organizations that want to change and grow support this type of inquiry because it is of benefit to the larger organization.⁵⁵ The impertinent question, while unlikely to please everyone, may serve to open unexplored possibilities. The impertinent question, however, should not be used intentionally to embarrass or harass another person. Neither should it be used to violate emotional or physical boundaries between a pastoral leader and the devout.

The impertinent question can serve as a creative pastoral practice when leaders are sensitive to the environment and the persons around, and not overly cautious so as to miss an opportunity for the deepening of human relationship. In a pastoral conversation,⁵⁶ the impertinent question allows pastors to get to the heart of a matter. Consider, for example, the scenario of a family gathered in the presence of a loved one who is dying. Family members and others in the community may dance tentatively

⁵⁵ Robert Sternberg and Todd Lubart point out that the “impetus toward innovation ultimately has to come from within.... [T]he most creative work in any field is unlikely to come from attempts to be a crowd pleaser. One needs to think in ways that others simply may not like or understand, or to ask questions that others will find *impertinent* or *irrelevant* (emphasis added).” See *Defying the Crowd* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 63.

⁵⁶ Howard Stone suggests the helpful terminology of pastoral conversation by which he refers to a ministerial “style of purposeful interaction with parishioners” that may be employed in a formal counseling session, or in many other informal contexts that ministry provides. See, for example, Howard Stone, “The Congregational Setting of Pastoral Counseling: A Study of Pastoral Counseling Theorists from 1949-1999,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 55 (Summer 2001): 188.

around the matter of death, primarily because the subject causes discomfort, even as the one who is dying may want to talk openly and freely about the subject. The pastor may serve as a catalyst to a very important conversation that the family needs to have. The impertinent question, sensitively and carefully asked, in this case directed to the dying person, may simply be: "How can we be most supportive of you? Is there anything you would particularly like to have us do at your memorial service?" It is impossible to list all the variations of questions that could be asked. The point is that they sometimes do need to be asked, and pastoral leaders need to be prepared to do so. In response to the pastor's question about ritual at her memorial service, one member responded that she would most like the community to engage in some form of ritual dance in her honor. She briefly demonstrated, even with a rapidly emaciating body, what her own practice had been for many years. The impertinent question opened a possibility for creating a ritual experience that was meaningful for the family and the gathered religious community. The religious leader is often afforded the opportunity, maybe even expected, to ask the impertinent question.

Creating Time

The leadership practice of "creating time" for relationship building is itself a sacred ritual and can contribute to the ritual life of marginalized and misfit communities. Time is created, in the Black Church tradition for instance, when people gather around the welcome table at the church picnic. In this environment, persons who experience the wounding effects of racism within the larger culture, come together in this space to engage and affirm one another.⁵⁷ Around the tables of abundant and sumptuous food,

⁵⁷Anne Streaty Wimberly, plenary address given at the Society for Pastoral Theology Annual Study Conference, 15 June 2001.

persons come to extend welcome and compassion to one another as they share experiences of difficulty and challenge, as well as joy and celebration. This welcome church practice is itself sacramental living.

The emphasis is on the *creation* of time, not simply setting time aside, for the purpose of building, sustaining, and nurturing relationships with others in community. Created time exists for the explicit purpose of being together in ways that nurture the human spirit. This time is reserved for free play. Furthermore, the practice of creating time can serve as critique of customary western ways of relating to time in which we use time, waste time, and buy time. Misfit pastoral leaders and communities contribute to their own healing, and to the healing of others and the world, as they create time for one another.

Improvisational Work

The practice of leadership as improvisation work is a playful practice that relates to the adverse effects of taking our work too seriously. A story from the life of an experienced pastoral leader illustrates the value of this practice. The church executive, who administers a large residential community for retired religious leaders, acknowledges that he faces many challenges at work, including the ongoing management of a large staff and the recruitment of healthcare professionals to serve in the long-term care facility. This church administrator recalls his own methods of study as a student. A studious and thoughtful student, he would spend hours re-writing lecture notes in an effort to commit the material to memory and to increase his familiarity with the subject matter. He was diligent in his attempt to learn and excel in school. Even with this concerted effort to develop mastery of the material, albeit a laudable method, the pastor

lamented that he still was only earning B's and C's in his courses. He reflected on the obvious disappointment of these results in light of the earnest devotion he brought to the task. Then, he changed his method of study. Instead of focusing so much attention on the means of learning the material, he states, "I learned to be less driven and rigid about my study habits. As I relaxed, I started to get A's in my courses."⁵⁸

This church executive feels sheepish about his own practice of improvisation. As the director of a large organization, he sometimes still has no idea what he will do in any given situation. It is in the course of events, such as during a meeting for example, that a decision or plan will, in his words, "just come to me." But far from being capricious or arbitrary, I would argue, preparation and skill inform this practice, or what Csikszentmihalyi calls the "creativity that comes to prepared minds."⁵⁹

Improvisation carries the somewhat negative connotation of "making something up." But this "making something up" has value. Again, I highlight Larry Graham's analysis of Picasso's *Three Musicians* that was previously explored in Chapter 2. Graham reflects that the "musicians are together, and playing music in spite of their participation in a broken, interconnected world."⁶⁰ The image of the musicians playing jazz is a reminder of the healing nature of our improvisational work. Impromptu, by the seat of the pants, off the cuff—various descriptions of improvisation—can suggest something less than what is expected of a skilled professional. Still, "making something

⁵⁸ Personal communication with interviewee, 18 June 2001.

⁵⁹ Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's statement during a lecture for the course "Creativity and Innovation," Drucker School of Management, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, Calif., Spring 2001.

⁶⁰ Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds*, 15.

up” or exercising what Dykstra calls pastoral imagination⁶¹ is precisely what needs to be encouraged in the ministry. Rather than expressing apology or regret for engaging in this practice of play—of improvisation—ministers need to proclaim boldly its merits, and theological students need to be schooled and mentored in the strengths and merits of this approach. Improvisation, as a means to move in the world, can be a lived reminder to one’s self and others that each moment of life is born anew. This kind of living builds on Abraham Heschel’s assertion about present experience: that “true insight is a moment of perceiving a situation before it freezes into similarity with something else.”⁶²

The development of creative leadership also requires that we imagine new and innovative ways of fulfilling the task. One such effort is currently underway.

Interplay between Technology and Leadership

The on-going development of religious leadership can be shaped in contexts other than the traditional classroom. Scott Cormode, a scholar in the field of religious leadership education, has developed a web site conceived of as “a learning playground for growing leaders.”⁶³ Prof. Cormode envisions this technological project as providing a “space for interesting things to take off.”⁶⁴ The information on the web site—which includes stories of pastors, literature citations to encourage further reading on various subjects, provocative questions, and case studies—is intended to foster thinking, interaction, and action. Pastoral leaders, especially those at great distance from actual

⁶¹ Craig Dykstra contends that one of the elements that is important for “success” in the ministry is the development of what he calls an “internal gyroscope” or “pastoral imagination.” Dykstra suggests that a pastoral imagination is a “particular way of seeing and interpreting the world” that requires a “peculiar intelligence” to the pastoral ministry itself. Craig Dykstra, “The Pastoral Imagination,” *Initiatives in Religion* 9 (Spring 2001): 1-2, 15.

⁶² Cited in Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 251.

⁶³ See www.Christianleaders.org.

⁶⁴ Scott Cormode, Claremont School of Theology, April 2001.

learning centers. can have access to honed expertise and wisdom by virtue of the existence of the site. This project takes one step into the interplay of using technology to enhance and support the work of religious leaders. Yet as valuable as I think this work is. I maintain that the development of creative and soulful religious leaders requires actual human relationship.

In this chapter, we have explored a theological foundation for the development of creative and playful religious leaders. We have examined literature, and a model of leadership that moves in the direction of adaptive work. Further, we have situated this model of playful, adaptive work in relation to the needs of contemporary congregations, especially those undergoing change and adaptation. Finally, we have examined misfit practices that can support the creative ministry of persons who provide leadership for these communities. In the next chapter, we turn to a method of education that can support the development of the religious misfit.

CHAPTER 5

Ollie, Ollie, Oxen Free¹—Play as Emancipatory Education

Without a keen educational consciousness on the part of our ministerial leaders, the life of the Church in the world is as likely to misinform, malform, and domesticate people as it is to inform, form, and transform them as agents of God's Reign.

Thomas H. Groome, *The Education of the Practical Theologian*

For successful education there must always be a certain freshness in the knowledge dealt with. . . . Knowledge does not keep any better than fish.

Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*

The culmination of the childhood game, Hide-and-Seek, comes with the declaration that all those who are still hiding can come in "free" without the possibility of being captured. This chapter develops educational theory and practice that seeks to enhance the responsible freedom of misfit ministers, and thereby assist in their contribution to ministry. The purpose and philosophy for setting persons free for the work of ministry is exemplified in the description and analysis of the following story.

A community foundation was formed in Claremont, California in response to a tragic event. A young African-American male was killed by a Caucasian police officer in the course of a routine traffic stop. The foundation wisely adopted a mission to foster projects that develop community dialogue and unity. John Fisher, a 1969 graduate of the city's only high school and a master craftsman in marble carving, was chosen for a project that would involve the whole community.² Unlike many artists who carve based

¹ Many variations exist in regard to this phraseology. A colleague, one generation older than the author, recalls using the phrase, "*All in Free*," as a child. The author remembers the phrase, "*Oxen Free*" from the same childhood game.

² For more information on the John Fischer Project, go to:
<http://www.communityevents.com/ccf/index.html>.

on a model or blue-print of the image they intend to re-present. John begins by chipping away at the stone in order to “discover” the form that lies within. The completed art piece also contains areas of the original rock’s rough surface as a visual reminder whence the images inside have emerged. The form discovered in this particular slab of marble depicted a *bearded* elderly Caucasian *man* playing a musical instrument with a young woman of African-Asian features looking over his shoulder. Within several months of completion, vandals chipped away pieces of the image, and left cigarette-burn marks on the surface of the marble. Many persons in the community felt hurt and angered by this violation of common property. In response, the foundation invited John Fischer, who graciously agreed, to restore the image, and it now depicts an elderly *woman* playing a musical instrument with the younger woman over-looking her shoulder.

This artistic process itself represents a multiplicity of interweaving relationships: between the marble-carver and the marble, between the artist and the community in which the images are “emerging,” and the on-going relationship between the “finished” marble image and all members of the present and future community who will interact with this art. John Fisher’s artistic method is a visual image of the emancipatory educational method of education I advocate in this chapter that has a number of characteristics. The method assumes that theological education should contribute to a habit of mind that says, “Let’s see what will emerge.” My purpose is not to provide a blueprint or model for what may then be implemented in the course of one’s ministry, but to suggest conditions and principles contributing to an education process that emerges in relation to a theological worldview that values play. The method assumes that finely developed skills and other competencies are integral to the creative process. Specifically,

persons need to gain facility in using the tools of critical reflection in ministry. By analogy, it would be impossible to carve without knowledge of the structure of marble as well as knowledge of tools and techniques for working in this medium. However, the artist's habit of mind principally influences what emerges. The same tools and techniques could be used to carve a chair or a table. The method assumes that the wisdom that comes from mastery knows when the project is finished, recognizing that the work is never complete. Finally, this method of education ventures forth, knowing that risks are involved, and they are, indeed, worth taking.

This chapter takes up a two-pronged perspective with respect to play. Play serves as recreation—as a source of rejuvenation, spontaneity, flexibility of the human spirit—as well as re-creation—as a means to participate in the process of change that leads to reform of systems and structures. Arguably both aspects are necessary to make space for creativity in our personal lives and in our corporate life because they can mutually influence one another. Social change can be sustained over the long term as persons have a means to rejuvenate their spirits, and the ongoing change of systems and institutions helps to ensure “a container” for the human spirit. Play as a liberatory education practice invites persons into ever-deepening communion with God, themselves, and the communities they serve. Specifically, the resources of critical pedagogy—the work of Paulo Freire, in particular—and the resources of political and liberation theology—most notably the theology of Jurgen Moltmann—support the argument in this chapter.

Thus far, we have examined the following dimensions of the argument: the contributions of play to vitality in the psychic life of misfit persons (Chapter 3); the means by which play enhances the capacity for creative misfit leadership (Chapter 4). In

this chapter, we explore play as it contributes to the practice of emancipatory education. This form of pedagogy allows persons to engage in the necessary critique of systems and contexts that give rise to oppressive structures. This pedagogy also calls for cultural analysis as well as thoroughgoing self-examination. The chapter adheres to the following structure: (1) Emancipatory Education, theological education, and terminology. (2) An articulation of principles of emancipatory education—dialogue and conscientization, including a contextualization within Clinical Pastoral Education. (3) An analysis of a liberatory theology of play and emancipatory education, with particular attention given to the critical theological perspective of Jurgen Moltmann in relation to the formation of ministers. (4) Play practices in Emancipatory Education, and (5) Limits of play as a method of theological education.

My argument in this chapter is that the theory of critical pedagogy provides a compelling framework to understand the dynamics of the present structures as well as the analytical tools to transform systems. Paulo Freire captures some of the value of this process of education: “There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.”³ My task as a pastoral theologian, caregiver, and educator is to assist persons—that is, to help them become more aware of themselves as emotional, spiritual, and rational beings—so that they may be able to speak what Freire calls a true word, and what I call authentic and life-giving words, in order to transform the world.

³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

Emancipatory Education, Terminology, and Links to Theology

In this section, I consider several issues: the spirit that Freire advocates for an emancipatory pedagogy, definitions of terms related to this method of education, and related theological literature.

A particular kind of method can be developed within theological education. Paulo Freire captures the spirit of an emancipatory method in what he calls a “pedagogy of happiness”: “this will be a pedagogy of laughter, of questioning, of curiosity, of seeing the future through the present, a pedagogy that believes in the possibility of the transformation of the world, that believes in history as a possibility.”⁴ Freire’s theory values a rhythm of life⁵ in education that envisions the creative possibilities for teaching and learning that can have effects within, and beyond, the defined boundaries of education.

A prefatory note on the use of terminology clarifies the discussion and analysis of this chapter. Throughout the argument, the following terms are employed: *critical pedagogy*, *critical education*, *emancipatory education*, *liberatory education*, and *transformational education*. These are the many terms used throughout bodies of literature on adult education and learning that are, for the most part, synonymous terms that take as their central premise a *method of education*. This method employs a form of

⁴ Moacir Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, trans. John Milton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 160.

⁵ Alfred N. Whitehead has influenced my own perspective on the dynamic quality of education. Whitehead outlines three basic stages related to a “rhythm of education” that requires freedom necessary for discovery as well as self-discipline: the stage of romance, the stage of precision, and the stage of generalization. The stage of romance is the period in which a person “falls in love” with the subject matter. This stage is not dominated by systematic procedure, but rather is marked by an awakening to novelty. The second stage—precision—is marked by the ability to analyze facts and information. The third stage is a period of synthesis and the beginning of the return to romance with the added advantage that the learner has the ability to build on ideas and techniques. Once a learner reaches the stage of generalization, he/she returns to the stage of romance with a more firm grasp and deepened understanding of the material. Whitehead points out that learning is a cyclical process. See Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, 24-44.

analysis, called *praxis*: observation and reflection on the actual world of lived experiences as well as actions based upon those reflections, in an effort to make changes that seek to enhance the freedom of persons and communities.

The important link, in my view, between the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and theological reflection is the notion of *praxis*, reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.⁶ Freire's emphasis on *praxis*, as a methodology, has informed the work of educators and theologians. Critical educators bear responsibility for empowering persons and for creating contexts in which students and others may experience their own power as subjects to engage in relationships and actions that help expand the freedom of all persons. Liberation and feminist theologians hold prominent the conviction that empowerment of persons, and creating conditions for freedom and exploration, is a faithful response to the creative and liberatory call of God in history. Critical pedagogy shares with liberation theology and reflection the critical method of *praxis*. This central notion, along with many other Freirean principles, has influenced practitioners and academics in the fields of religious education and liberation theology in Latin America, Asia, and the United States.⁷

Principles of Emancipatory Education

The historical development of the critical principles of dialogue and conscientization allow us to see that the negotiation between conformity and idiosyncrasy is part of an on-going effort that informs the transformation of self and community.

⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 36.

⁷ The work of Paulo Freire has figured prominently in scholarly writings in liberation theology, religious education, as well as pastoral and practical theology. Among the many sources, the reader may consider the following: Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books,

Particular attention will be given to the work of Paulo Freire, who has written extensively in relation to these two concepts. We examine the concepts of dialogue and conscientization in relation to the theological education of misfit students. Illustrations are derived primarily from clinical formation settings that train chaplains and pastors.

Dialogue

The meaning of dialogue emerges from the foundational concept of the dialectical method. This method has its roots in western philosophical systems developed since the Enlightenment, drawing from the work of Hegel and Kant.⁸ The purpose in raising the method here is to draw its connections to the field of critical theory, largely developed by the scholars at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, who influenced the development of the *praxis* method. As David Held points out, the distinguishing factor in this method is "its recognition of the insufficiencies and imperfections of 'finished' systems of thought. [The method] reveals incompleteness where completeness is claimed."⁹ Critical theorists, then, begin with the assumption that "men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege."¹⁰ The dialectical method emphasizes that we create, and are created by, our environments. I am making an explicit connection between the dialectical method of inquiry and the notion of dialogue. For Freire, true dialogue emerges from a direct encounter between persons, mediated by an experience of the world, in their attempt to name the world. The dialogue, even between so-called "equal partners," can be a

1973); Letty M. Russell, *Growth in Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981); Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁸ David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

⁹ Ibid., 177.

¹⁰ Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools* (New York: Longman, 1989), 166.

complex and multi-layered interaction given the multitude of inevitable contradictions that persons bring to the conversation. The dialectical method itself serves as a critique to any simplified notions of dialogue.

Second, the essence of dialogue is the word, which includes the components of action and reflection. I am pointing to the dynamic quality of the word: that is, its possibilities for affecting, and being affected by, others. The “word” is not static; it is, in my view, always taking some form of action that either serves to help heal or to help hurt the world. Freire argues “critical reflection is also action.”¹¹ This statement holds together the dynamic tension between critical thinking and meaningful activity in the world. An authentic form of human existence comes with the integration of both components of the word. Freire’s treatment of this dichotomy serves as the background for his emphasis on *praxis* (he calls this the “true word”) which has the power to transform the world.¹² This analysis has resonance deep within the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. The Hebrew language has a multivalent term for “word” (*dabar*) which includes the “idea” as well as the “action.”¹³ So, for example, one would speak of a person as “just” only if the person embodies the principles of what it means to live justly. Freire’s identification of *praxis* as the one “true word” explicitly links dialogue with liberatory activity in the world.

Third, dialogue implies that the “voice” of every participant is important. Freire argues that dialogue is a creative activity in which the subjectivity of each person needs to be honored. When persons gather to name their world, they are in essence telling their

¹¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 123.

¹² *Ibid.*, 76.

¹³ See Francis Brown et al., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 182-83.

stories, the narrative experience of their lives. Dialogue can foster the kind of relational power we discussed in Chapter 4. No single perspective can name normative experience. Nevertheless, through the complex relationality within and among persons, and given the differences in individual experience and social location, there may be multiple and even conflicting interpretations of reality. Dialogue can be a beneficial process, when ethical parameters are set for the expression of as many voices as possible, to help persons see the ways in which our worldviews and perspectives are constructed. The goal is not arrival at a fixed, agreed upon idea, but rather the “continuing transformation of reality.”¹⁴ According to Freire, dialogue exemplifies the model for genuine communication and education.

Henry Giroux, a critical pedagogical theorist, offers an expansion to the concept of “voice.” Giroux helps to dispel the notion that “voice” is one-dimensional. He argues that voice is “multifaceted and interlocking set of meanings through which [persons] actively engage in dialogue.”¹⁵ Giroux alerts us to the various dimensions of personal and collective experience which inform the construction of voice or authorship. We might most appropriately speak of the concept of “voices” rather than a singular “voice.” A critical pedagogical *praxis* facilitates a context in which dialogue is encouraged. In this way, participants may learn to speak, and hear the power in, their own voices.

Fourth, dialogue can bring us to an encounter with what Freire calls “limit-situations.”¹⁶ In the experience of dialogue, persons may encounter situations that seem insurmountable, like concrete barriers. Sometimes, though not always, the experience of

¹⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

¹⁵ As cited in McLaren, 229.

¹⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 89.

“hitting the wall.” as it were, is caused by the perspective we hold. That is, if we feel a situation to be hopeless or impossible, then it more likely will be. Freire’s emphasis on the limit-situation should not be interpreted to mean that no actual limits exist. Rather, Freire’s use of the term “limit-situation” points to the need to examine critically the perspectives we hold. Indeed, the process of dialogue may bring persons to places of discomfort. Educators need to exercise discretion and caution at all times. Caution is especially warranted when persons are feeling uncomfortable or anxious because of the possibilities for harming or being harmed by others. Educators can help reduce the possibility for harm by setting the parameters for discussion early on and then returning frequently to the guidelines. To the extent that persons can meet and explore ethically and responsibly those places of discomfort within themselves and in the company of others, possibilities for genuine learning and transformation may abound.

Dialogue—as a means to navigate linguistic terrain and to work toward our involvement in transformation of our environment and world—can serve as response to the problem of conformity and idiosyncrasy we are investigating. Dialogue offers a means by which misfit ministers may engage in the process of naming their reality, questioning assumptions, and beginning to take steps toward transformative change. We turn now to an investigation of the concept of conscientization that is closely linked to the notion of dialogue, and serves as an extension of that initial process.

Conscientization

Conscientization is the on-going process of challenging and transforming social structures so that they are less oppressive and more humanizing. Freire argues that conscientization is the necessary practice of those who claim a liberatory vocation.

Through dialogue and conscientization, students and others learn to “name the world, define problems, make decisions, and engage in action” that transforms.¹⁷

Freire argues that conscientization is the “deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.”¹⁸ As persons engage in action to humanize structures of oppression, their own consciousness develops in regard to the various circumstances that initially give rise to de-humanizing systems. It is appropriate to speak of conscientization as the completion of a cycle of awareness that will eventually lead to further questions. This form of critical pedagogy prepares students for a life-long engagement with their world. It is not simply a tool or technique to be learned and then discarded. Rather, conscientization represents a way of living and learning that invites us to ask ever-deepening questions about the structure of human relationships and our connection to the larger web of creation.

Conscientization is intimately related to the notion of struggle for helping to create a reality that embraces the humanity of all persons. Freire cautions that this developing process of awareness does not end with the perception of the situation.¹⁹ It is not sufficient merely to recognize obstacles on the road to human liberation. We must be prepared to struggle against them to create new possibilities. Action and reflection are implicit in Freire’s notion of dialogue. To engage in dialogue is itself a critical task. Conscientization, then, is the learning process of continuing to pose problems with regard to one’s social context and to take steps of liberating action. The process of

¹⁷ Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 190.

¹⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 101.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

conscientization leads to further dialogue and vice versa. While conscientization requires considerable effort, the struggle itself is part of the activity that can bring forth new life.

Now I turn to an analysis of the implications that the emancipatory principles of dialogue and conscientization have within the context of pastoral theological education in order to show the pedagogical value for developing healthy misfit ministers.

Contextualizing the Principles in Clinical Pastoral Education. A number of questions emerge as I bring critical pedagogical principles to bear on clinical pastoral education.

First, dialogue and conscientization may help to bring a critical awareness to the process of peer group reflection. For example, in addition to the tasks of visiting patients and attending interdisciplinary seminars, chaplains-in-training with Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) meet regularly in a peer group. In this practice, persons take mutual responsibility for one another's education by making commitments, both verbal and written, to offer support and critique to one another in an effort foster the development of pastoral identity. A supervisor serves as a guide and facilitator of the learning environment, establishing the context and conditions in collaboration with members of the group. The peer group provides the context in which students question one another in regard to assumptions about ministry, encounters with patients, and professional identity. My own experience in CPE confirms that dialogue is possible among persons even though at times it is difficult and arduous work because of the vastly different interpretations that people bring.

In fact, as a result of dialogue in a peer group, persons may or may not critically reflect on their experience and make appropriate changes. The following example shows

how dialogue can lead to change. One student assumed that the role of the chaplain included visiting every patient on the medical floors for which he had responsibility. This was a rather high expectation, since he had more than 80 patients. The group helped him to clarify the meaning of a pastoral visit. They suggested that at times a visit of a few minutes in duration might be sufficient, while at other times it might be necessary to stay for an hour or more. The chaplain intern learned that the goal was not to visit as many patients as possible, but rather to offer pastoral care with a depth of compassion in situations where it was most needed. Dialogue in this context embraces Freire's dual dimension of action and reflection.

With regard to the critical phase of conscientization, the CPE process faces ambiguity. Supervisory personnel may encourage student chaplains to develop a critical consciousness in some areas while stifling it in others. An example focuses the point. When I worked at a large teaching hospital, the chaplains in a peer group became aware of an inconsistency in the institution's proclamation of "handicap accessibility" even as the door to the chapel was inaccessible to those in wheelchairs. They brought this issue to the attention of a hospital administrator who was pleased to implement their recommendation that called for an automatic opener to be installed on the chapel door. Another issue, however, received less than an enthusiastic response. The chaplain peer group advocated for the pastoral care staff to have the same charting privileges staff (i.e. the ability to write notes in the patient's medical chart) as others on the hospital. Since the chaplains deemed spiritual care to be an integral aspect of healthcare, they proceeded to advance the issue. (Note: some hospitals encourage chaplains to write chart notes). This step brought resistance from the hospital administration that, in turn, made the

chaplains aware of other efforts to be taken on behalf of patient spiritual care. These are two illustrations of how conscientization plays a role in the education of student chaplains. The above discussion illustrates the ambiguity of the conscientization process. In one instance, effort leads to change, while in the other it seems to have no effect. It would not have been possible to know in advance which would have been the case.

Second, dialogue and conscientization may be considered an extension of the chaplain interns' primary religious commitment. The following example illustrates the point. A group of CPE chaplains, comprised of two Roman Catholics, three Seventh-Day Adventists, and two Presbyterians, gathered at a large regional medical center. One of the peer's group's central learning goals was to understand the core tenets of the different denominations represented in the group. After entering into dialogue, however, persons were actually less interested in belief structures, per se, and more captivated by the ways in which each person in the group had experienced the oppressive and liberating elements in her/his denomination. The question turned from, "What do you believe?" to "How does each tradition support or fail to support authentic, life-enhancing faith?" This dialogue helped persons to see the strengths and limitations of their own faith group, and fueled a renewed commitment for some to transform structures that impede the development of mature faith. One of the Catholic men even pledged to work for the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

A Limit to the Principles. We also encounter a limit to the notions of dialogue and conscientization. It is important to note here that representatives of some religious traditions have argued, as a theological principle, that dialogue with persons outside that tradition can be a detrimental practice. This argument is made in an effort to preserve

and protect the beliefs and practices of a particular faith community. Even as I have endeavored to show the benefits of dialogue, I recognize its limitations. Other limitations to the notion of dialogue and a pedagogy of play are explored at the end of the chapter.

As a pastoral theological educator, I exercise respect for student hesitancy and caution: to do otherwise would be a violation of my own educational principle that honors different abilities among persons in the discovery of learning. For some persons, their commitment to *participate in an educational program* with persons of other denominations and faith traditions is itself one *important step in the dialogue* process. Exposure to beliefs and practices of others can be threatening for some. Educators need to exercise caution, care, and respect using the dialogue process in CPE, recognizing that some aspect of the Holy dwells within every faith tradition, and within and among all persons. The exercise of caution and care is one significant way to model professional behavior and respect for the boundaries of all persons.

A Liberatory Theology of Play and Emancipatory Education

Recall the image of marble carving described at the beginning of the chapter. The exploration of the foundational principles of dialogue and conscientization serve as learning tools that inform our ability to develop a method of playful critical inquiry in theological education. Play is one means by which the tools can be employed. The theological vision of play, as developed in Chapter 4, places this educational philosophy within a worldview that values play for its religious and spiritual significance.

The theology of Jurgen Moltmann, German theologian, educator, and early proponent of a theology of play, serves as a resourceful dialogue partner, in part, because

his theology of the church builds on the notion of *praxis*.²⁰ Moltmann's theology serves to focus our analysis on how the church as a liberative community can embody play. This perspective is a beneficial theological perspective because it values human persons for their inherent worth, and not solely in relation to what they are able to produce. In Moltmann's vision, the church becomes a locus for the liberative activity that is needed within culture at large: the playful church serves in the world, and also seeks to help counter the conditions of dominance and oppression that exist in workplaces and the culture at large.

Moltmann suggests, without further elaboration, that a difference exists between "alienated forms of merely apparent good fortune" and "the liberating forms of enjoyment."²¹ I identify the former as the frivolous nature of play while I identify the latter as the transformative power of play because it places an emphasis on the experience of joy in community with others. Moreover, this distinction offers a standard of assessment of play's value in any particular example or situation because play is liberating, in my view, to the extent that it opens greater possibility for enjoyment for all persons, not simply a few. Finally, Moltmann argues that play has the capacity to reorient our lives toward real and sustaining life: "[I]t is possible that in playing we can anticipate our liberation and with laughing rid ourselves of the bonds which alienate us from real life."²²

Intimations of the liberatory power of play are found in the Christian tradition: All who want to enter the kingdom must first become like children.²³ In the Buddhist

²⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

²¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, 3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Paraphrase of Matt. 18: 3 (NRSV).

tradition, there is the concept of “beginner’s mind,” which means, to bring “fresh” awareness to each moment and let the conditioned thoughts drop away. In this frame of mind, persons experience life situations as if they were children having an experience for the very first time. These two religious strands, among many others, bring a vital point to our attention: childhood and the early stages of life offer important clues/reminders for other life stages. Children are notably curious, inquisitive, exploratory, and imaginative. Children learn more readily in contexts that engage these qualities. These qualities are inherent, though often masked by “maturation” in the lives of mature adult persons, as well. As a critical educator, I foster and nurture these qualities in persons who are in preparation for ministry.

A professor at a state university once, in a conversation with me, insisted that children do not know anything. He argued that they had to be taught everything they know, including all of the traditional subject matters like reading, mathematics, and writing. I inquired whether he also thought children had to be taught how to play. The educator retorted, “That is the only thing children know how to do on their own.”²⁴ The assumption behind this statement follows a well-worn path that Freire calls the “banking model”²⁵ of education, whereby one person transfers information or knowledge into the mind of another. This approach to education is inadequate for the formation of adults in pastoral ministry. A critical model of pastoral education demonstrates a deep respect for the knowledge that persons already bring to the clinical setting and also can re-awaken persons to dimensions of life that have been submerged or forgotten. At its heart, the Freirean method of education is inherently humanizing. In his theoretical schema, the

²⁴ Personal communication with educator, Fall 1992.

²⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 57-64.

student is the Subject of his/her own history and vocation, and together instructors and students can build an alliance on behalf of liberating the human spirit from de-humanizing and oppressive structures. In his later work, Freire continued to emphasize the importance of a pedagogy of heart that incorporates a sense of wonder and curiosity in learning.²⁶

Play can serve to resist the dominant movement in work, education, and church settings that emphasizes productivity above all else. Moltmann argues that play functions to enhance the creative since it “goes beyond the categories of doing, having, achieving and leads us into the categories of being, of authentic human existence and demonstrative rejoicing in it.”²⁷ Play can be a counter-cultural activity that opens the human spirit to freedom. One sign of a liberated humanity is the ability to engage in “power-free, sincerely creative play.”²⁸ By “power-free,” Moltmann is suggesting the *absence* of oppressive power relationships among persons and within institutions. The church (at the time of his writing) is struggling with its identity within the culture, a phenomenon that Moltmann acknowledges has been discussed since the European Enlightenment.²⁹ Against this background, Moltmann argues that the church’s relative lack of importance within the culture actually represents a possibility. Moltmann contends that one of the most important theological lessons the liberated church can offer society is the recognition that the enjoyment of one another and the enjoyment of God is itself a

²⁶ See particularly, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, trans. Patrick Clarke (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 49-84.

²⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

valuable lesson.³⁰ Thus, Moltmann's analysis takes us beyond conceiving of the church as a locus for reproducing itself and the services it renders, into the realm of creative change and possibility. The creative contribution and possibility that the marginalized church can offer society is its very existence as a "purpose-free fellowship" that does not seek to justify its own ends. Rather, this vision of the church seeks to enjoy and serve God and one another. Ministers need to play in their ministries, to value play theologically, and to be schooled in the proper uses and limits of play, in order to cultivate what Moltmann calls "purpose-free fellowship."³¹

Moltmann's analysis of play points to what is needed in theological education. He argues that play, as a creative process, supports the development of "productive imagination" and "spontaneity."³² Moltmann bases his argument for creativity in the theory of Herbert Marcuse, a scholar at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, who contends that the realization of freedom in society requires that there be a transformation in the nature of work itself.³³ By extension, I am arguing that the nature of ministry can be beneficially transformed when persons are freed to participate in creative play. My argument is that, as persons experience freedom to play and support the creative play of others, they are participating in the encouragement of two key components of a liberating community: spontaneity and being-there-with others.³⁴

Spontaneous energy stimulates the expression of original ideas, and is the energy that, in part, makes possible interesting and engaging human relationships. At times,

³⁰ Ibid., 63-64.

³¹ Ibid., 68.

³² Ibid., 70.

³³ See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

³⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, 71.

there can be little room for spontaneity within the context of the regulated and coercive patterns of religion. The church as a liberative community, I argue, needs to make room for the expression of productive imagination among its members, and most surely needs leaders capable of recognizing its value. Mechanical and prescribed ways of engagement over time tend to dull the human spirit and stifle creativity. Genuine spontaneity that exercises regard for the well being of others, however, can enliven ministry and invite authentic responses from other persons.

As a learning metaphor play is a form of engaging misfit ministers in the present moment, while imagining a future of open possibility. An example helps to illustrate the point. In a CPE experience, at a university teaching hospital, a new group of chaplain interns gathered in a participatory seminar to role-play scenarios of doctor-patient and chaplain-patient visits. An African woman from Nigeria insisted that a young white male in the group should play the role of the physician because "it is a role for a man."³⁵ The Caucasian chaplain intern declined to "play" the physician or the chaplain role, and instead encouraged the African woman to assume the role of the doctor. After a period of hesitancy, she agreed to participate and later expressed her enthusiasm for this experience, since in her cultural background it would be unimaginable for a woman to serve as either a priest or a physician. This reversal of the chaplain intern's expectations marks a turning point in her educational process. In this experience of play, the student was not only imagining a different future for herself, but also participating in its realization.

³⁵ Personal communication in the Clinical Pastoral Education program at UCLA Medical Center, 15 June 1998.

Productive imagination also promotes a renewed sense of solidarity among persons. Moltmann distinguishes between the notion of “being-there-*with*-others” by which he infers solidarity, and the notion of “being-there-*for*-others” by which he means a type of parentalism. The liberative church, Moltmann argues, seeks to stand in solidarity with persons. Contemporary pastoral theological literature illustrates more particularly how this form of solidarity, or “being-there-*with*-others,” can be described. A relational stance between caregivers and those seeking care may be characterized as “inter-pathy” as distinguished from sympathy and empathy.³⁶ I favor the term “inter-pathy” because it points to the inter-relationality between persons, and recognizes that the caregiver is situated by social location, and is capacitated with unique strengths and limitations for offering care.

The notion of “being-there-*with*-others” allows for empowering education and ministry. Play fosters the capacity to interact with others. Moltmann’s analysis is limited with regard to its consideration of issues of contemporary concern such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, able-bodiedism, and classism. Moltmann points us in a helpful analytic direction. More particularly, Moltmann’s analysis accomplishes at least two important goals: first, it develops a theological argument which links the value of play to human freedom and liberation; second, it articulates a call to the church and religious leaders to participate in this liberative movement.

The connection between play and the demands of religious ministry can be strained. Play, as an educational metaphor, has its limits that are explored at the end of the chapter. As a complex metaphor, play captures the nuance, paradox, and internal

³⁶ See David W. Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling across Cultures* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 17-47.

complexity of education. In the context of theological education, an emphasis on play serves to counter the tendency toward burnout and exhaustion in the ministry. As Jerome Berryman reminds us, in our playing we “discover our deep identity as creatures who create. . . which in turn enables us to cope by creating with and transcending the existential limits that both confine and help define us.”³⁷ In my experience as a clinical pastoral education supervisor, I encouraged chaplain interns to foster that “deep identity” within that brings restoration when we are weary. These efforts are even more pressing, in my view, because of the demands that healthcare contexts place on productivity and patient visitation quotas. Play can also be a valuable resource in helping to negotiate the emotional demands and personal challenges that many pastors encounter in the course of a long ministry in one place, especially in the midst of a changing environment.

I turn to a discussion of elements, including dialogue and conscientization, that inform the practice of a liberatory theological education in the clinical context.

Clinical Pastoral Education as Locus for Liberatory Play

I examine the connection between play and principles of a critical, engaged educational theory in *praxis*—dialogue and conscientization, risk, vulnerability, and love—in order to demonstrate how these principles may be embodied in relationship. The theory of Freire continues to support prominently the discussion.

First, pastoral education in the spirit of play supports a context of dialogue and conscientization. According to Freire, conscientization is the on-going process of challenging and transforming structures so that they are less oppressive and more humanizing. This form of critical pedagogy prepares students for a life-long engagement

³⁷ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 13.

with their world—wherever they engage in ministry—and within clinical settings.

Conscientization represents a valuable way of living and learning that invites us to ask ever-deepening questions about the structure of human relationships and our connection to the larger web of creation. A pedagogy of questioning ignites curiosity within the context of clinical learning.³⁸

The relationship between play and conscientization is not as foreign as one might think. An example illustrates the point. A group of chaplains—comprised of a conservative Jewish rabbi, an evangelical Baptist minister, a Mennonite layperson, an evangelical Presbyterian minister, and two progressive Presbyterian ministers—rarely could agree on any theological issue. However, after the members committed themselves to understanding a social issue and its implications, the dynamics began to change. The group participated in liberatory play as it exhibited a new found spontaneity, and desire to stand in solidarity with others. As the group members made this commitment, they experienced an increased level of joy in their relationships with each other. The group even brought a spirit of spontaneity to their own consciousness-raising project that was to discern a variety of factors that contribute to the oppression of prostitutes. Some members of the group, who had previously approached the subject of prostitution only as a moral religious issue, began to see the links between the oppression of women, patterns of abuse, and economic survival. The chaplains together began to imagine ways to raise questions and begin dialogue in their own religious communities in order to mobilize people around this issue.

³⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 79.

Second, with regard to the process of conscientization, I want to emphasize that it is “conceived as a recurrent, regenerating process” that helps students and others to navigate unknown territory, whether this terrain is represented by structures of internalized oppression or patterns of social oppression.³⁹ The process of conscientization, then, leads to further dialogue. In the example cited above, the chaplain residents returned to their group work in the hospital prepared to discuss the implications that critical *praxis* brings to religious life. The ministers realized that they now had more questions about how their own belief systems informed misconceptions about prostitution. Transformative work continues so far as students and others are prepared to address social systems as well as their own participation in those structures. A spirit of play is important within the context of CPE because persons may bring vastly different commitments to their education. The critical work of education occurs as supervisors facilitate, to the greatest possible extent, an environment of safety and trust in order to foster the development of critical consciousness.

Third, a liberatory pastoral education involves risk. Sharon Welch, a feminist theological ethicist, suggests what risk requires: “an ethic of risk leads to a particular type of action, a construction of responsible action as the creation of a matrix of further resistance.”⁴⁰ A risk-taking pedagogy takes us beyond the realm of “skill gathering” into the area of “person empowering” ministry. In pastoral theological education in the clinical setting, the beginning steps of risk-taking happen in the context of the small

³⁹ Antonia Darder, *Culture and Power in the Classroom* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1991), 95.

⁴⁰ Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 75.

group setting, and may give rise to actions of social resistance and transformation outside the group.

True risk-taking, while it entails psychological maturity, also carries political and social potency. An example more clearly illumines this point. During a unit of CPE, a chaplain intern moved closer to embracing his own sexual identity as a gay man in the ministry. Disclosing his sexual orientation involved considerable personal risk. The student had fears of being shunned by his faith community and ostracized by other chaplains. While the internal fears were certainly a formidable factor in his experience, the chaplain intern also found the strength through a supportive community to join with other persons in the progressive church community working for more inclusive policies with regard to lesbian/gay/bisexual persons. After the chaplain was able to express his identity more openly, he brought deeper levels of trust and playfulness to his own ministry. A pedagogy of risk and responsibility, as Welch's articulation makes clear for us, is not simply about solving the problems of individual persons. Rather, this pedagogy encourages persons to join in coalition with others to bring a creative response into fruition. Everyone engages in this work differently. As a pastoral educator, I understand that risk-taking in the context of clinical education often begins with personal stories. The goal of theological educators is to help persons critically reflect on their personal stories as they may contribute to, as well as distract from, the work of ministry.

From a pastoral theological point of view, risk-taking is a complex notion. When persons have reached a certain level of psychospiritual maturity, taking steps toward social transformation can be a self-empowering experience. However, not all risk-taking can be viewed this way. Pastoral educators need to proceed with caution in relation to

risk-taking for a couple of important reasons. Some students may have reasons to fear and resist taking risks. Fear and resistance can be indications that there are psychological, physical, and spiritual places of wounding and trauma. To encourage persons living with such pain to take risks before they are ready could lead to further damage to their personal well being, and to the well being of those with whom they are in relationship and ministry. Moreover, persons need to be as alert as possible to the implications and ramifications of the risks they intend to take. A developed awareness of the implications of action helps persons to claim responsibility for their actions even in those situations in which the outcome is not as they would have intended. From a pastoral theological point of view, we cannot assume that all risk-taking is beneficial. For some persons, risk-taking carries the intention to inflict harm either on themselves or on others. At no point is risk-taking considered acceptable when it contributes to any kind of clergy misconduct.

Fourth, I want to highlight the significance of love and “appropriate vulnerability”⁴¹ for pastoral education because of its possibilities and limitations related to play. I conceive of CPE as a crucible in which student chaplains themselves may experience a foretaste of the care they extend to others. So, in a word, I share my own love of life with them, which also includes my love of them. I have been particularly touched in my own life by those educators who loved me—persons who appreciated, affirmed, and reveled in my inherent worth as a human being. As a theological educator, I bring this love, an intention of the heart, to ministry as part of my own spiritual practice and as a way to accompany others in the education process. Love, for me, is at once

⁴¹ Karen Lebacqz, “Appropriate Vulnerability,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 256-61.

intimately related to the spirit of play that I bring to my own ministry and also a profound commitment I make in support of the liberation of all beings.

Karen Lebacqz, a theological ethicist, employs the phrase “appropriate vulnerability” to signify the kind of sexual ethic that is needed in Christian theology.⁴² The terminology, and its underlying principle of maintaining mutual regard and boundaries in relationships between persons, provides language to describe an ethical relationality in pastoral theological education. This ethic is needed because a theology of play can all too easily be misused or abused by those who actually may intend to inflict psychological, as well as spiritual and physical, harm on others through violation of boundaries. Pastoral mentors with other ministers-in-formation need to honor the subjectivity of other persons by sharing, only in so far as it is appropriate, experiences in ministry of struggle, contradiction, and wounding as well as joy and love. We assess the meaning of “appropriate” in this context by the following: the presence of clear and flexible boundaries that respect the personal and physical integrity of each person, as well as an allowance for the expression of vulnerability that does not violate one’s self or another.

A Misfit Proposal for the CPE Curriculum

In this section I attend to several ways in which emancipatory education practices could influence the clinical pastoral education curriculum to illustrate further how the philosophical principles are grounded in our work. To this end, we examine three clinical pastoral education tools in relation to critical pedagogy: the learning contract/covenant, group process, and pastoral supervision.

⁴² Ibid., 256.

First, the learning contract is a central aspect of clinical pastoral education. The purpose of this "contract" is to delineate the pastoral care assignments that a chaplain intern will complete during a course of study. Various components of the "contract" include writing projects, on-call work in the clinical setting, and participation in didactic seminars. Each ministry site varies these components based on specific need. Nevertheless, the concept of "contract" is inherently flawed, because it implies that one party sets the agenda while another is left to adopt the agenda. Instead, I propose the use of the term "covenant." This word has deep resonance within the both Judaism and Christianity (e.g., Yahweh establishes the "covenant" with the people of Israel, and persons "keep covenant" with one another), and connotes a commitment from both "sides." The term covenant is preferable to contract because the former honors the importance of the relationship between the partners, while the latter refers to the work that needs to be accomplished according to prescribed conditions. Covenant suggests that there is mutual regard for the relationship, as well as the task.⁴³ An emancipatory educational process envisions that chaplain interns are actively engaged in establishing their own agendas for learning.

Second, the peer group serves a vital educational function. The literature in social psychology gives attention to the following aspects of group work: the patterns of group dynamics, participation differences between men and women, personality types and group involvement.⁴⁴ These particular issues, while important, are not our focus here. Rather, my argument has sought ways to support multi-cultural and interfaith learning

⁴³ See, for example, Margaret A. Farley, *Personal Commitments* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Jonathon Gillette and Marion McCollom, eds., *Groups in Context* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1990).

through the paradigm of play. Religious education serves the purpose of liberation in so far as it embraces the complexity of modern society. We can serve the best interest of student chaplains by gathering a peer group that reflects cultural diversity. It is not sufficient to encourage student chaplains in their own conscientization process if pastoral education as a field is not willing to engage in critical reflection. The educational process, as a whole, needs to place more emphasis on social, cultural, and religious analysis.

Finally, an emancipatory *praxis* of clinical pastoral education requires some changes to the current environment and practice of supervision. I advocate the replacement of the title "supervisor" with an alternative such as clinical theological educator. "Supervisor" may suggest a business and managerial relationship that, in my view, can interfere with learning, especially when persons may otherwise be considered ministerial colleagues. Even the term "co-visor" serves a more appropriate pedagogical purpose. A liberatory pastoral education relies on an educator's ability to sit with persons as one who "co-visions," as one with whom to investigate learning issues and questions and to discern vocation with misfit students and ministers.

This method of supervision is closely associated with what Paulo Freire suggests for the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentorship is one means by which pastoral educators can support the education of the religious misfit. Freire's operating premise is that mentorship serves a liberatory education as long as it meets certain conditions.

First, the mentor "challenges the student's creative freedom."⁴⁵ The mentor holds responsibility for assisting persons to make choices that enhance life-giving choices for

⁴⁵ Paulo Freire, "A Response," in *Mentoring the Mentor*, ed. Paulo Freire et al. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997), 324.

themselves, and for communities they serve. The mentor suggests possibilities for service, avenues for inquiry, places for exploration and growth. Mentorship requires honesty, integrity, and commitment. Persons serving as mentors need to held accountable through their own professional communities of challenge and support so that all may be guaranteed, in so far as possible, of the highest standards of excellence.

Second, the mentor “stimulates the construction of the student’s autonomy.”⁴⁶

The mentor begins with experience of the mentee, which includes her dreams and aspirations. The selfhood of the mentee must always be honored and respected. It is, thus, inappropriate for a person in the role of mentor to employ other persons as extensions of themselves, asking others to fulfill tasks and responsibilities that serve primarily the glorification of the mentor. Caution must be exercised so that the autonomy of the mentee is not subsumed by the mentor’s own commitments to professional advancement and institutional service.

The paradox of the mentor-mentee relationship is this: the persons most suitable for mentoring are those who do not need, for the sake of their own ego gratification, to be mentors. A mentor is one who, while in a position capable of exercising what Loomer calls unilateral power (has a place in the hierarchy to affect the life of the mentee), chooses to exercise relational power (allowing one’s self to affect and be affected by the life of the mentee so as to develop a professional relationship). This is not to suggest that hierarchical relationships are inherently negative, and that they need to be abolished. More clearly, the paradox of a good mentor-mentee relationship lies in the mentor’s *recognition of and use of her/his power*. A good mentor does not *need* to be a mentor. A

⁴⁶ Ibid.

good mentor is able to exercise relational power with a mentee, even given the power differential.

Play Practices in Emancipatory Education

We turn now to an expanded discussion of practices for pastoral theology, care, and counseling contexts of theological education. These practices may be applicable both within the clinical environment and within the seminary classroom in an effort to support the liberatory practice of play for misfits. *Healthy misfits are those who exhibit a willingness to engage in learning from experiences in community with others.*

The Educational Value of Making Mistakes

Making mistakes is an essential component of a playful pedagogy. A personal ministerial story illustrates the point. Once while standing before an entire gathered community I finished reciting the Apostle's Creed ahead of everyone else in the congregation. I had forgotten to recite one entire line. After the service, a couple of prominent members of the congregation greeted me warmly and commented about how glad they were that the minister made mistakes. The mistake, in this context, served an unintended purpose: it strengthened the bond of emotional intimacy between us by revealing the humanity of the minister, and communicated in embodied relationality that making mistakes is not something about which we need to be overly self-conscious.

A playful pedagogy builds on the value of making mistakes, of falling down metaphorically. Certainly, the perspective we hold with regard to mistakes also influences how we will respond to them. The point is not to make mistakes in order to teach somebody something, but rather to teach and learn together through the mistakes.

The claim to having “made a mistake” should not be construed as a valid reason, under any circumstances, to violate appropriate professional boundaries.

Making mistakes, though, sometimes can reveal important information or tell a story. For instance, Freud believed that slips of tongue revealed the conflicts in our psyches, resulting from the repression of libidinal energy.⁴⁷ Mistakes may reveal that we think one thing and speak another. The mistakes we make, in one sense, teach us something about how our minds make associations.

In an educational context, mistakes are invaluable to the instructor with regard to a learner’s experience. Sometimes mistakes are an indication of lapses in knowledge and preparation, as in those instances when persons have not done basic reading. Mistakes of this sort can be revealing and important to address if they occur repeatedly, in an educational context. An instructor who speaks with a person about their mistakes opens the door to other possibilities, such as learning what may be occurring in the context of the person’s life. In other instances, mistakes reveal a lapse in concentration or attention, which connects with the story above.

Mistakes may also come when people do not feel comfortable in a setting or otherwise are responding to the emotional tenor of an environment. A colleague, for instance, acknowledges that she makes mistakes often in situations when she feels uncomfortable because she assumes there is only one correct way of behaving. A playful pedagogy seeks to make space for persons to feel more at ease with themselves and others and does not overly pressure persons to perform.

⁴⁷ See particularly, Sigmund Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 80-114.

Revealing Lessons from Play Days

As a CPE Supervisor-in-Training, I included a play day in each of the units that I supervised. The purpose of the play day was to encourage the building of community through the strengthening of interpersonal relationships. Chaplain interns were free to decide how to spend the day together outside the hospital. Basically, two caveats guided the activity: the play day had to allow for everyone to participate since it was a group experience; and the occasion needed to be relatively inexpensive, if any cost at all was to be incurred.

Three groups made use of the Play Day in different ways. First, a summer CPE group, comprised of seven persons of various ages, denominations, gender, and ethnic backgrounds, corporately decided *not* to have a play day together since they could not come to consensus on what to do. Even when the idea of a play day was introduced early in the unit, one member of the group seemed ambivalent. The group decision was duly influenced by the voice of this powerful member. The person was quite hesitant about play. She contended that if we were going to “waste our time” with such activity she would rather stay home and catch up on matters with her consulting business, work that she had to accomplish after business hours for the duration of the CPE unit. Instead, the group agreed to participate in a teaching seminar at a local mortuary on the topic of pastoral care after death. It was easier for the group not to play than it was to take the risk of engaging together in unfamiliar space, or engaging the member who was most reluctant. My suspicion is that this chaplain intern is simply one mirror for how some religious people view play: often we would rather use the time to get seemingly more important things done.

A second group noticed that a play day was scheduled for a day after the mid-point of the unit. Even during the first week of the unit, they began asking questions about the day, and planning possible scenarios. For this group, play together represented a form of escape. Through all of the planning and orchestration, the group eventually decided on a detailed plan of how to spend the day. They decided that we would arrive at the Huntington Museum, where would spend approximately two hours perusing the galleries and grounds; then, we would go to lunch at a local restaurant; after that, we would screen a film at a local theater. The day was well planned and executed, and also had the feeling of working at playing, with little space for the actual activity.

Finally, a third group agreed to have a day of play together at one member's home. The day began late and ended early. Persons had different ideas of what would be playful and rejuvenating. One member enjoyed cooking and preparing food for the other group members. That was the essence of play for her. Another member enjoyed long conversations on topics related to religion or current events. Still another member, embroiled in the complications of a job search and battles at a current position, felt too overwhelmed with life challenges to play. Two other members liked to play formal games such as frisbee or computerized videos. This group had a fragmented day of play.

These examples, while not exhaustive of the many scenarios of how persons play (or refuse to play together), nevertheless illustrate the challenges of the topic. First, the play of one person is not necessarily the play of another. Since wide variations exist among persons, a group may not necessarily have a play-filled experience together. An attempt at community building, then, may easily devolve into everyone satisfying his or her own personal needs. Second, the human tendency to plan and orchestrate can be so

deeply embedded in our behaviors and psyches that even when we are given permission to play, we are unsure of how to do so. Third, play requires intentional cooperation among many participants. The refusal of one has an effect on the many.

The experiences of trying to play together, nevertheless, provided learning opportunities for the groups. Even the group that did *not* play together reflected on their experience. Since we continued to meet as CPE learning groups after each of the play days, I was able to glean responses from persons and help to generate conversation among them. First, with regard to the group that did not play: the member who had the most influence on this decision remarked later in the unit that she resisted the idea of playing because of many negative play experiences as child. This personal revelation provided the group and the supervisor with learning and awareness that play—or the realization of not having been able to play—can bring painful memories to the forefront for some persons. Second, the group that *worked* at playing together actually learned that they enjoyed planning their day of play more than they enjoyed the day itself. Several members of this group vocalized that much time was devoted to planning the day for a couple of reasons: one, they enjoyed mentally considering the possibilities for the day; and two, they thought play sounded more appealing than work. Finally, the group that had different ideas about play actually learned that the fragmented day of play revealed some of the relational tensions that persons were feeling in the group. So, through the experience of play, this group began to address issues of conflict.

Still other groups had what might typically be referred to as “successful” days of play. One group organized a trip to the ocean where they rented canoes and enjoyed a day spent canoeing, eating lunch together, and lying on the beach. The experience was a

successful day, as the members reported, because it was rejuvenating and relaxing. They expressed appreciation for their colleagues and the opportunity to gather with one another—just for the sake of being together—without the pressure of attending to paperwork and clinical visits. From my view as a clinical educator, I considered the day, and others like it, a success because the students expressed the desire to create contexts in their own ministries in which persons could also experience the value of playing together.

Faithfully Transgressing⁴⁸

Play as an educational practice can generate subversive and sustaining ways to transgress faithfully.⁴⁹ Since the potential exists for the misuse of this practice, I emphasize that its engagement relies on the sound ethical judgement of educators and students. We examine two dimensions of this misfit practice: play generates excitement and *eros*.

Education and learning hold the possibility for excitement. This assumption, which undergirds education at the earlier grade levels, is often lost at the highest levels of education because it is thought to disrupt the so-called serious nature of learning.⁵⁰ Similarly, to encourage excitement in the classrooms of seminaries is to transgress accepted boundaries because discussion of religious beliefs and practices is often assumed to be a serious matter. A community can generate excitement together as persons take interest in one another, hear one another's voices, and recognize one another's presence. We must also, however, not lose sight of the reality that

⁴⁸ The phrase is my adaptation of a Bell Hooks' phrase. See *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Hooks' precise statement follows: "The idea that learning should be exciting, even 'fun,' was the subject of critical discussion by educators writing about pedagogical practices in grade schools, and sometimes even high schools. But there seemed to be no interest among either traditional or radical educators in discussing the role of excitement in higher education." Ibid., 7.

transgressing this boundary can be frightening for some people. From a pastoral point of view, the excitement needs to be balanced with appropriate public decorum. The “appropriate” level of behavior is measured, in part, against the best professional judgement of the instructor who helps to create the conditions in the classroom. Decorum is also measured against a list of standards and guidelines that can be developed and distributed to a class at the beginning of a course.

An educator, for example, may generate opportunities in the classroom for persons to make connections between insights and awareness relative to the course material (“ah-hah experiences”) without asking participants to express intricate details. Exercises in which persons reflect on, or write about, their responses without expressing them to another person help to limit the expression of excitement. Such practices illustrate a means to support faithful transgression. This is faithful transgression, in my view, because it holds together the *dual responsibility* of allowing for *emotionality* in the classroom (the transgression) within the framework of *established ethical and principled guidelines* (the faithful aspect) to direct its expression.

Play can help generate the experience of *eros* in the classroom. *Eros* is what feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock calls “the power of our primal interrelatedness,” that which “creates and connects hearts, involves the whole person in relationships of self-awareness, vulnerability, openness, and caring.”⁵¹ Erotic power leads to the healing and mending of human relationships. Unfortunately, to the detriment of us all, *eros* has too often been relegated to the realm of physical, sexual intimacy between partners. An engaged, and therefore radical pedagogy, though, takes seriously

⁵¹ Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 26.

the role of *eros*, passion in learning that subverts the mind/body split, and allows persons to be whole as well as wholehearted in the classroom.⁵²

Given the centrality of *eros* in human relationship, *eros* has a place in the liberatory classroom. The seminary classroom offers an environment to temper, shape, and channel our loves rather than diminish them. While recognizing the transformative power of *eros*, theological educators also bear the critical responsibility of teaching professional ethics with regard to ministerial leadership. This is of crucial importance because of the devastating effects on the lives of persons and communities when pastors violate—often through sexual misconduct—the relationship between pastor and parishioner.⁵³ *Eros* can be a means of faithful transgression, only in so far as *eros* is held in tension and balance with ethical guidelines and boundaries.

Movement from Understanding to Encounter

As an educational practice, play emphasizes a participatory and engaged form of knowing. In play, we participate and engage in our lives, and the lives of others, without necessarily having an understanding of them. One of the possible dangers related to education and understanding is premature closure. We assume something has been adequately and cogently been figured out, and then fail to see that which is new.

An example illustrates the point. A colleague labored for months to understand various personality types through a popular diagnostic tool known as the Enneagram.⁵⁴ In this conceptual system, every person “fits” one of nine different dispositions. One day

⁵² Ibid., 193.

⁵³ For an extended treatment on this topic, see Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

⁵⁴ A number of resources exist for interpreting this personality tool. The following are recommended: David Daniels and Virginia Price, *The Essential Enneagram* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2000); and Renee Baron and Elizabeth Wagele, *The Enneagram Made Easy* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994).

she sighed in exasperation. "I have to figure out what number people are so I can understand them." The colleague was practicing a variation of what many of us do: working to understand through a pre-conceived notion or fabricated lens. Once we have determined the correct "type" we assume that we have the basic outline of who people are. Such tools can be useful for broadly illuminating general patterns of human behavior. Nevertheless, these tools also can be problematic, especially when we assume that an understanding of a broad, arbitrary category of personality can help us understand the unique human being we are encountering at the present moment.

Illustrating Emancipatory Education: Sand Play Education

Sandplay can be a useful complementary technique to traditional forms of talk psychotherapy.⁵⁵ We examine it here as a complement to the dominant mode of verbal expression in educational settings. The distinction between psychotherapy and education is important to note. Psychotherapy refers to a method of addressing emotional and life-situational conflicts and problems in an interaction between a skilled clinician and a person seeking treatment. Pastoral care education refers to the process of student learning in interaction with a trained teacher about methods that can increase the ability to help and care for others in contexts of ministry. This method, as illustrated here, is a form of pastoral care education. The purpose is to demonstrate an alternative modality to talk by helping students to play with concrete symbols and images. This technique can be useful, in turn, by providing students a tool to employ in their own ministries of care with persons and groups as a means to access, and then to express, aspects of the non-rational mind. The technique may be particularly suitable, as well, for working with

⁵⁵ For a useful theoretical and practical guide to sandplay, see Rie Rogers Mitchell and Harriet S. Friedman, *Sandplay* (London: Routledge, 1994).

children since their facility in language is still in development. This practice, as a form of play, is also well suited with regard to persons who are physically disabled since it does not assume the ability to be mobile.

A description and analysis of this technique follows. Ideally, an educator will have 300-500 miniature figures that can be placed in trays of sand. Some practitioners argue that more figures than this can be potentially overwhelming for students. The sand trays themselves, with painted blue bottoms and sides meant to symbolize either water or sky, can be filled with different colors of sand, for instance, white or red, in order to highlight the visual contrast with the objects. One educator, however, finds that red sand can provoke a rather intense emotional response in some people. The collection of figures, used to enact scenes, actual or psychic, may include small plastic representations of human beings or animals. Other pieces, among the many possibilities, that are needed in the collection include the following: small artificial trees or other vegetation, as well as structures, such as churches and houses.

In this practice, the educator does not occupy the role of interpreter but rather the role of observer/commentator. This distinction relates to my argument in the following way: through this practice of play, persons may be able to *experience the freedom* to learn what is important to them. It does not impose the learning from the outside. The role of the educator is to help facilitate the context in which this learning can occur. The interpreter, from a psychological perspective, is responsible for naming and framing the experiences of persons using language that they may or may not employ themselves. The interpreter helps make connections between seemingly disparate aspects of another's experience, helping the person to see in a new way. The commentator, on the other

hand, acknowledges, describes, and reflects what one sees without making explicit reference to possible links to aspects of another's experience. Connections are to be made in the mind and experience of the student, not by the teacher for the student. As a practice, the educator pays attention to such aspects as the placement of the figures in the sand in relation to other figures and objects; notes any feelings that the person expresses before, during, or after constructing the scene; and records the student's own interpretation of what is occurring. Through this play-filled practice, educators may assist students in making meaning of their own psychic experience, which arguably, influences the ability to engage in meaningful action in ministry.

Realizing the Learning Limits

As valuable as the role of play is to a liberatory process of theological education, limitations exist in this work. First, with regard to misfithood, the experience of one's marginality can serve as an opportunity for growth and transformation, for one's self and others, but it also presumes the support and solidarity of a larger community, beyond the confines of any context of theological education. My argument does not explore or develop this theme. Second, play as pedagogy develops in relation with others, through dialogue and conscientization, as I have argued here, a kind of knowing that puts one in touch with a range of feelings, emotions, and experiences that contribute to the work of ministry. However, this pedagogy may be less well suited to contexts of pastoral theological education in which more decidedly content-based information is required, such as a course in the study of chemical addiction and substance abuse, for example.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Creative practices exist to help learners master large bodies of information. For instance, Helen Davis, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, replaces the lyrics of a familiar musical tune with the complicated symptoms of diseases. This practice draws on different brain capacities

Third, for the most part, examples in this investigation have been limited to my own supervisory experience in pastoral theological education. Traditional classroom practices arise from my anticipation of teaching in a theological seminary. Fourth, while play may seem more applicable to small group and seminar-style courses, it might be developed in large lecture courses as well. For example, an instructor in a large course could begin each lecture with a short-exercise, such as a role-play, short game, or reflection piece that sets the context for learning during the time together. Fifth, play as a pedagogical process also may not be suitable for working with particularly sensitive personal material such as experiences of abuse and trauma. Educators and pastors need to be alert to these issues and provide an appropriate context of care and support.

Finally, theological education of misfit persons that opens to freedom and possibility needs to recognize that misfit ministers may choose to leave the ministry. The challenges and difficulties of fulfilling a call to leadership in the institutional church may present death-dealing obstacles for some persons. Within some religious communities, the presence and pressure of dynamics related to sexism, classism, racism, able-bodiedism, and homophobia, among others, may prevent persons from responding to a call to ministry. In this case, the task of theological educators is to recognize, and point out for others, the personal limits and costs of living with the tension of marginality. If theological education is to be a liberating experience for the whole people of God, then we must realize that the primary goal is to foster the creative discovery of each person's vocation, wherever that may lead.

to help students master a large body of information. This pedagogical technique is an apt and creative response to the challenges inherent in educating medical care practitioners in content-based courses. See <http://search1.npr.org/opt/collections/torched/wesa/datawesa/seg122482.htm>.

In this chapter, we have considered some of the elements that may contribute to the cultivation of misfits in theological education. We have explored the critical tools of dialogue and conscientization for what they can offer to an emancipatory pedagogy of play. We have focused on the context of clinical pastoral education to examine how this practice of education is contextualized. Further, we have examined a theology of play that informs the education of misfit ministers in the settings of the clinic and the theological seminary. We moved to an elaboration of playful practices that can support the educational development of misfits. Finally, we noted and explored some of the limitations of this emancipatory pedagogy. In the next chapter, we turn to a pastoral theological analysis of play that illumines the care of misfits.

CHAPTER 6

Let's Play Hide-and-Seek: Pastoral Theological Analysis

I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead am wandering awed about on a splintered wreck I've come to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, whose bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty beats and shines not *in* its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them, under the wind-rent clouds, upstream and down.

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

I once had the privilege of watching a group of Tibetan Buddhist monks create a sand mandala. The mandala was a carefully crafted work of art with minute and intricate detail, using many colors of sand. It spanned some ten feet in diameter. The monks collectively devoted hundreds of hours, over the course of several weeks, to the creation of this masterful work of art. An imperfection, though, is always left in the mandala as a reminder that every aspect of creation is continually in process. After its completion, the sand mandala is taken to the nearest river. In a ritual intended to signify the impermanence of all things, the monastics pour the beautiful work of art into the river.

This ritual of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition illustrates in art form what I have communicated in words about play itself: that play is to be engaged in for its own sake; for the sake of developing creativity and beauty; for the sake of our participation in the ever-flowing river of life. The image conveys in art form what we have been exploring in regard to the religious misfit: the different colors—all the bits of misfit sand—when placed together with attention and care, produce a work of art worthy of placement in a museum's permanent art collection. The beauty is not held, though; it is released.

The sand mandala also conveys in image form the problem I have been addressing throughout the dissertation. That is, play can help to navigate between conformity and idiosyncrasy in the development of creative and still responsible religious leaders for the work of ministry. The cultivation of misfit ministers, in part, requires caring for persons with attention—aware of the intricacy and beauty that each can possibly bring to the larger whole of pastoral leadership—in much the same way as the monks care for the placement of the colorful sand.

Thus far, we have examined the following dimensions of the argument: the contribution of play to vitality in the psychic life of misfit persons (Chapter 3), the means by which play enhances the capacity for creative misfit leadership (Chapter 4), and play as emancipatory pedagogy in the theological education of misfit ministers (Chapter 5). This chapter develops a pastoral theology of play that contributes to the cultivation of marginal ministers. The field of pastoral theology has traditionally and distinctively been committed to the care practices of the church and brings a particular form of expertise to the task. This expertise is the critical reflection upon the interrelationship between theology and actual experience in order to construct and revise theories and practices that contribute to the care of human persons and communities. The vision of play and its possibilities emerges from my theological conviction that creativity is at the heart of God's nature. We need to care for ministers in ways that enable and support the emergence of creativity within and among them. The vital qualities of leadership, including the capacities for imagination, flexibility, and introspection, need our attention and care.

The argument in this chapter is developed in four parts: in the first section, we examine how pastoral theology contributes to the cultivation of a particular type of wisdom that I name, *misfit wisdom*. The second section examines the care of play and misfits within formalized contexts of theological education such as the theological seminary and clinical pastoral settings. We move in the third section to consider elements of caring for misfit communities and transitional spaces. Finally, in the fourth section, we explore caring for misfits through spiritual care practices.

Cultivating Misfit Wisdom

Pastoral theology is a discipline that stands on the edge of the academy in an effort to reflect critically and thoughtfully on how theological wisdom can best be embodied and practiced in our caregiving. Pastoral theology stands on the edge for this reason: as a field we concern ourselves with precise and critical thought on what may be considered the imprecision, flexibility, and variance inherent in the actual lived faith experience. “Pastoral theology” is sometimes used to refer to all “arts of ministry,” those areas of a theological school curriculum that integrate theological theory with the practice of ministry. As a branch of scholarship in the academy, pastoral theology maintains a commitment to precise and critical thought. As a field dedicated to the practice of ministry, pastoral theology also has another commitment. Pastoral theology assists seminarians and others to be self-reflexively more aware of who they are as blessed creations of God; to be more equipped to engage in the messiness of the world and the church—in the hallways and sanctuaries and meeting rooms—where neatly organized theological explanations and categories may be inadequate or even viewed with suspicion. Pastoral theology helps to form persons for the complex work and play of

ministry in which the qualities of flexibility and imprecision can be as vital as structure and precision.

We care for and cultivate wisdom as we help the misfit theological student and minister become more aware of the ethical responsibility of living with difference, and thus, the corresponding contribution that it can make to the larger community. As we have explored in the dissertation, the presence of misfits challenges the dominant paradigm. Persons and systems resist misfithood, though, because it is often not the way of success and popularity. Nevertheless, the counter-cultural way of the misfit is often consonant with what it means to live the Christian life.

We return to the three dimensions that the holy fool brings to the work of pastoral care, as we briefly explored in Chapter 2. Recall that Campbell argues that the holy fool embodies folly as simplicity, folly as loyalty, and folly as prophecy.¹ The rediscovery of the “disheveled, gauche, tragicomic figure of the fool”² recasts the focus of pastoral care and, as I have argued in regard to the playful misfit, the very nature of religious leadership. Here we examine how play, as a specific and complex form of folly, contributes to the development of these important *healthy misfit* qualities.

First, play can contribute to a renewed encounter with simplicity and simple presence while engaging the complexity of marginal experience. Campbell suggests that folly as simplicity helps persons to rediscover the spontaneous parts of ourselves that may have been lost or neglected in the pursuit of “adult wisdom,” and opens persons to live and respond spontaneously.³ The playful misfit, like the wise fool, approaches

¹ Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care*, 56.

² *Ibid.*, 55.

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

problems with directness.⁴ Care must be exercised so that the ability to be direct and spontaneous serves the well being of persons and does not, in any manner, lead to the intentional violation of physical or emotional boundaries. We have considered how some misfits are able to reach the heart of a matter with regard to a group dynamic or a parish problem, with relative rapidity, because of their development of emotional intelligence along with rational intelligence, which we explored in Chapter 3.

Second, play may open us to a new sense of loyalty. This kind of loyalty is defined as our capacity to respond creatively and adaptively to God and one another. Loyalty in this sense is a commitment to a way of living faithfully in the church and the world. Loyalty, as this conception intimates, need not necessarily be conceived in a grim way. Campbell argues that the wise fool is foolhardy, and is willing to commit one's self to a cause or belief in spite of what others might say.⁵ I have argued that the commitment we make as persons—our primary loyalty—is with one's self, one another, and God, knowing that the intention of this Creative Serendipitous God is to invite misfits, and all persons, to rich and abundant life. Campbell rightly argues, I believe, that the significance of the fool's loyalty is the knowledge that no guarantee exists that circumstances will work out in their favor.⁶ We have examined how the misfit is willing to take educational and leadership risks, and to venture responsibly in new directions of ministry just for the sake of doing so.

Third, play can serve the ends of liberation and emancipation: it has a prophetic dimension. A resilient and active dimension of the wise fool is exemplified in the

⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁵ Ibid., 59-62.

⁶ Ibid., 61.

exercise of the prophetic role, which Campbell observes, has historically “functioned as a form of challenge to the accepted norms, conventions, and authorities within society.”⁷ Prophecy gains its potency from the fact that “it does not fit with the ‘common-sense’ assumptions of the day: it cuts cross-grained to earthly power and authority, announcing God’s judgment upon it.”⁸ We have explored how the play of emancipatory educational practice honors the subjectivity of persons and contributes to the transformation of reality. We have also examined that play contributes to the prophetic dimension of ministry as it develops adaptive leaders capable of exercising power and authority practices that support the health and vitality of congregations and communities undergoing change. In an age of ever-increasing movement toward standardization and professionalism, the image of misfit, like that of the holy fool, shows us that wisdom can come from the margins of our experience.

Other “pieces” of wisdom have emerged from our exploration. Play as a practice can serve at least three important functions for the formation of ministers. The following are my own formulations. First, play offers us the misfit wisdom of pretending. Through play, one can pretend—assume a role—just to see what it is like. Play as a practice of taking on the role of minister serves the important function of crossing the threshold into the world of professional ministry. An example illustrates the point here. I remember how shocked I felt when I first received mail addressed to the “Reverend Michael Koppel.” Having the experience of “pretending” to be the minister before it actually happened may have helped lessen the shock since a period of adjustment is sometimes necessary in order to become accustomed to roles, titles, and expectations.

⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁸ Ibid., 64.

Second, play can offer relinquishment. Play serves to “interrupt” our hold on what we consider to be most important in order to gain renewed perspective. Play as practice can be a means to enliven the ministry when the embers of passionate commitment burn low or when one begins to over-invest; that is, take excessive control of the community of faith’s life and direction. Play as practice contributes to the way one engages in the work of ministry. To consider one’s work a form of play—which includes opportunities for digression, repetition, humor, serendipity—helps to mitigate against the stresses in the vocation.

Third, play can offer restoration. By this I am arguing that play restores persons to the deep wisdom of the ages, the misfit wisdom that knows that in our existence is blessing. In play, we may be restored to the knowledge that the purpose for human life is not principally about fitting in, but more importantly for creative and authentic expression. Play, I argue, helps to restore persons to the wisdom of relationality—in which persons create time for the purpose of being together—as we explored in the leadership practices and theological worldview of Chapter 4. The practice of play can allow for the embrace and embodiment of whole-hearted joy for its own sake as well as for the healing and restoration it may bring to the human heart.

Once more I return to the wisdom I have gleaned from working with persons at the end of life. Rarely, if ever, do the reflections of persons at the end of life include any desire to have conformed to the standards and expectations of others. Rather, there is an implicit assumption, and verbalized sentiment, that “depth” and “vitality” have come as persons have enjoyed and played in their lives. For many, their enjoyment and play come

in the pursuit of, and dedication to, one's loves—love of family and friends, love of God, love of vocation and avocation.

The larger purpose for cultivating misfit ministers and misfit wisdom is to enlarge the soul of ministry. Arguably, the heart of ministry and pastoral leadership relies on the cultivation of imaginative, creative, and thoughtful persons. I return to the words of James Dittes because he speaks provocatively about the soul of ministry:

Ministry is not in answering questions or in having questions answered. Ministry is precisely in the creative process of continually reshaping questions and reshaping answers. Ministry is in the process of re-calling, reforming, revisioning, ever peeling off what is partial and encrusted in human resignation and contentment with forms in order to leave room for the boiling vitality of God's creative, redemptive spirit.⁹

The experience of play, and the aspects of wisdom that it cultivates in the misfit, helps to foster creativity in ministry that may allow for the manifestation of what Dittes calls the "boiling vitality" of God's Spirit. This claim can be made based on the process-relational worldview we explored which argues for the inter-relationship among all aspects of creation. As *healthy misfits* participate in life-giving, creative work in the world, so we also, in a sense, participate in the Creative Work of God. Play is soul work when it is properly and ethically contained so that it can help to enlarge our capacity to relate internally with ourselves and responsibly with other persons. It is a profoundly challenging task for our own ministry as theological educators, and for our work with seminarians. This soul work requires an on-going effort to "move out of the way" of what Dittes calls the "boiling vitality" of God's Spirit in order that we may discover new patterns and means for our own play.

⁹ Dittes, *Re-Calling Ministry*, 27.

Caring for the Misfit in Theological Education

In this section, we will explore, drawing upon notions already elaborated in the dissertation, some of the dimensions of caring for the misfit in theological education. Our exploration will include the following: mentoring as sacred work, caring for “failure to meet” (a case study), caring for the environment of the theological school classroom, and finally, caring for differences in motivation among misfits.

Care Through Mentoring the Misfit

Caring for the misfit in theological education may require shifting our perspective in regard to the teacher-student relationship. As we explored in Chapter 5, the establishment of a mentor-mentee relationship may serve to enhance the learning and development of the student and thus be an important practice in theological education. The fostering of this relationship can provide the space necessary in order to give attention to the particular needs of students.

Mentoring can be playful and sacred work. It can be sacred in that it offers a holding relationship for the emergence of the True Self in the theological student. It can also be playful work because the primary task is developing a relationship between two persons with safe and sufficient boundaries so as to provide adequate space for flexibility and exploration. Each mentor-mentee relationship is unique.

We care for theological students through mentoring because the role modeling they receive in this context influences the practice of ministry. The transfer of information is not the only important aspect of the relationship.¹⁰ Significant lessons are conveyed between mentor and mentee through encounter and observation with ways of

¹⁰ Sternberg and Lubart, *Defying the Crowd*, 294.

conceptualizing problems, thinking for one's self, establishing a community of support, relating to students and colleagues, and developing relationships in the field. In short, the heart of mentorship is the tenor of the relationship.

Mentoring can take place in a one-on-one relationship and also in the midst of a learning community. Since one-on-one mentoring itself can be labor intensive and require much care-filled attention, mentoring of the misfit theological student may take place most practically within the context of a mentoring/learning community. I conceive of a mentoring/learning community as a group of students and faculty who intentionally gather to focus on issues related to growth and development in ministry.¹¹ The formation of this type of community can serve as a holding environment for misfit theological students to discern questions related to vocation. The development of mentor-mentee relationships and mentoring communities within a theological school augments any mentoring relationships that students establish with their own denominational judicatories.

Caring for our "Failure to Meet"

In our care of misfit ministers, we also need to attend to the many and varied ways that "failure" plays an instrumental and beneficial role in their development. The role of failure is connected to the psychic development (as we explored in Chapter 3) as well as the educational development of the misfit theological student (as we considered in

¹¹ Mentoring communities exist on college and university campuses to support the professional development of current and future teachers. My suggestion is a variation of this model. Theological seminaries can help prepare misfit ministers for the work of ministry by providing contexts in which they may discuss problems, questions, and struggles with staff and faculty—persons who would comprise the mentoring community for students.

Chapter 5). I employ as a case study, a situation from my own theological education to demonstrate how the theory we have explored illumines the experience.

As part of my doctoral clinical residency, I pursued Supervisory Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Bolstered by previous experience as a CPE chaplain intern, I felt drawn to the process of supervisory education. I began the formation process with a sense of adventure. For a period of time, I delighted in the educational experience. I thought CPE to be a place where I could bring my True Self to the work of ministry. As I entered the formal certification process of the organization, however, my sense of delight turned to dismay. Most of my experience with the organization—including interaction with its members and supervisors—has been valuable for my own development as a pastoral caregiver. My pastoral theological analysis, therefore, is developed in an effort to strengthen the organization and its ministry, as well as to argue for an alternative lens to interpret and care for *healthy misfit* experience.

The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education has firmly established guidelines in their certification manual for the training of supervisors. The implementation of those guidelines is based primarily on consultation meetings between a candidate and committee, comprised of five persons, that makes decisions about certification. In the days before meeting with a certification committee of the regional organization, I expressed my enthusiasm—to my supervisor and colleagues—for the experience I was anticipating. I had worked diligently in preparation of written materials for the meeting and was genuinely enjoying the ministry of teaching and clinically supervising the chaplain interns in the hospital. I assumed that the experience would be collegial, friendly, and interactive. This was not to be the case. I had a sense during the meeting,

and only later was I able to articulate, that this committee of five people was engaged in psychoanalyzing and objectifying me. I struggled with thoughts and feelings of failure conveyed through the committee's decision *not* to grant me recognized status as candidate for supervision *at that time*. Emotional distance and further reflection upon this experience yields insight, especially when viewed through the lens of play.

In short, what I initially viewed as "my" problem to "pass the committee" was, in fact, not just "my problem" alone. Using the theory of Winnicott that we explored in Chapter 3, I will demonstrate how a confluence of factors led to a "*failure to meet*" between persons. Recall that Winnicott argues that the True Self emerges in the inter-relationship or what he calls the intermediary space.

A "failed meeting," then, is basically an encounter in which persons are unable to move into potential space and play together. I did not initially interpret the experience this way. Rather, I internalized the sense that I had "failed" to demonstrate my abilities as a pastoral care provider and educator with the committee members. This experience was made all the more disappointing for me in light of my genuine interest and commitment to the work I was doing. With reflection, I have come to see this situation from a different angle. The "failure" arose in the interaction between us: I failed to read their gestures, and they failed to read mine. We were not able to negotiate relationally through our different ways of interacting and experiencing life. To the committee, I seemed "too positive," and they had the suspicion that they were encountering my False Self, the compliant, conformist aspect of the Self that Winnicott identifies as important and necessary to adaptive social interactions with others. The paradox of the situation is

this: the more I labored to express myself genuinely and authentically, the more the committee seemed to distrust my efforts. It seemed to be a downward spiral of events.

Given my experience, I propose a couple of options for clinical pastoral education. Obviously, in order to be certified as a pastoral educator, the certifying body needs to know that persons are competent in the work they propose to do. Yet, together we failed “to meet” and the result is that my competency as a clinician was called into question. One provision that could be developed to provide a better holding environment for these interactions is to enlist the presence of a coach/therapist/referee who could facilitate the interaction. Another provision is that misfit ministers need to care for themselves psychologically and socially by establishing support networks and systems that can assist them to engage the ongoing challenge of balancing the need for conformity and idiosyncrasy within the process.

Unfortunately, in experiences like these, students can too easily conclude that there is something wrong with them. A distorted perspective, however, can come from both sides. At issue is the failure of persons to meet one another in what Winnicott calls the intermediate area or potential space. The interaction demonstrates “mis-fitting” in that we did not meet one another; we did not match.

This failure to meet one another does not, however, demonstrate what Gardner calls “fruitful asynchrony.” If, indeed, there were enough flexibility within the domain of the certification process, provision would be made for recognizing, affirming, and even celebrating the ways that different personality styles enliven the field of clinical pastoral education. In Gardner’s view, a domain that allows for degrees of difference is one that sustains creativity.

Caring for the Classroom Environment

Another way to care for the *habitus* of theological education, and hence the misfit theological student, is to consider and configure the classroom environment much like we would equip a full-service playground. While recognizing that no educational environment can meet all the necessary provisions for persons within its context, we still need to care for the many different ways that misfit ministers develop, and to care about teaching persons the ethical responsibilities of exercising their misfithood in ministry.

Adults, like children, enjoy playing on different kinds of equipment. In order to foster an optimal learning environment, different kinds of “apparatuses” (educational practices) need to be constructed. This requires instructors to be intentional about fostering creativity. Part of the educational responsibility for the instructor in a formal classroom setting as well as a minister in a congregational setting is to orchestrate the learning. To facilitate teaching and learning for others requires passion for the subject matter as well as a skillful means to initiate others. My assumption is that, drawing on their own life experience as well as useful theory, misfit ministers are particularly attuned to the engagement of a variety of playful practices. These include some of the practices we have explored in the previous chapters: sparking the imagination, honoring of feelings and emotions, tracking submerged themes and issues in a pastoral situation, and being willing to ask the impertinent questions. To care for the classroom is to care for what Winnicott refers to as the holding environment.

I propose that a pastoral education method that cares for play and misfit theological students include attention to the holding environment by attending to the five

following steps. My proposal assumes an attitude of respect and critical reflection toward tradition, as well as a commitment to serious and accurate attention to academic honesty.

First, attention needs to be given to the preparation for, and containing of, the play space. This provision asks that educators give particular focus to their mental attitude as well as the conditions they set to establish a tone within the environment. For example, the pastoral care instructor may devote fifteen minutes to meditate or reflect before the beginning of class, and ask students to do so before each session as well. Second, pastoral care instructors care for play as they engage persons in a manner that demonstrates a commitment to theoretical as well as emotional connectivity. So, for example, as instructors present course material and engage students in discussion, care must be given to allow for the expression of feelings as well as critical reflection on material.

Third, instructors need to support experimentation with creative and novel ideas as well as innovative practices. For example, especially with students who also have a field education component, each time a class gathers time may be devoted to asking the questions: How did you play, or what new thing did you do this week in your ministry? What, in your view, helped to make for success or failure? What did you learn either way? Fourth, pastoral care instructors need to encourage improvisation and make provision for mistakes to serve as valuable learning experiences. For example, especially for students new to the practice of pastoral care, attention can be given to allow them to re-work papers or clinical material throughout the course in an effort develop further insight and analysis. Finally, pastoral educators care for play in the educational setting by developing means to give feedback to, and elicit feedback from, students on a regular

basis. This aspect of the educational method recognizes that learning is a cooperative and engaged enterprise. For example, feedback can be elicited from students each class session by asking for a two-sentence summary as to what they found valuable in the class session as well as what they would have liked done differently.

Different kinds of learning assignments represent the different apparatuses on which people like to play. Educators of misfits need to attend to variety in this regard as well. Assignments need to spark the imagination as well as the intellect. I suggest giving attention to a combination of the following commonly-used practices: short lectures, discussion and small group work, breaking into diads and triads for developing responses to the lecture material, and group presentations. I offer a number of innovative assignments that could be incorporated as well: (1) requiring students to take a retreat day during the semester to reflect theologically on the benefit of this practice for their ministry; (2) requiring students to engage in a regular and consistent play practice of their choosing and to consider its relationship to their spiritual lives; (3) requiring students to develop a multi-media presentation of their choosing to demonstrate engagement of principles, concepts, and ideas explored in the course; and (4) requiring students to participate in role-playing to develop facility in the practice of pastoral skills and techniques.

Caring for Differences in Motivation

Caring for misfit theological students means that we also must care for differing levels of motivation and passion that they may bring to education. Let us consider three hypothetical types of persons who represent different dispositions toward education and

the work of ministry. These brief sketches guide the discussion and help to demonstrate the challenges and possibilities for inviting students in play.

First, there is the student who is ready to learn and relate issues and questions raised in the classroom with the practice of ministry. Second, there is the student who sees the educational degree as a means to an end: necessary coursework and requirements are seen as the steps necessary for certification or ordination in the church. This person will usually learn what is required, but is not necessarily interested in taking any further initiative. Third, there is the student who comes to theological education not necessarily looking for a challenge to their faith perspective, but more as an endorsement of the perspective they already hold. These sketches represent caricatures and are not intended to represent actual persons.

Into all of these sketches, though, it is possible to introduce play as means to help enliven passion, cultivate novelty, stir people up, make them “less fitting” to their dominant *modus operandi*. What does play contribute to the learning of each of these students? I propose that play offers the eager and oftentimes serious student, the space not to be constantly reading, questioning, and analyzing. While invaluable academic skills, they may limit the accessibility that a person has to others and others to her. The old dictum that “all work and no play, makes Johnny a dull boy” is applicable here. The student who focuses primarily on scholastic achievement can sometimes be limited in terms of emotional connectivity with other persons. Focus on academic study alone is not sufficient for the relational demands placed on persons in leadership positions in ministry. Play may introduce this student to a more complete range of experience.

Second, for the one who envisions a degree program as just fulfilling a requirement, then play itself may also need to be a requirement. In order to respect the subjectivity of the student, the instructor needs to provide a range of options available for play. It could be the case with persons who want to complete the requirements in order to practice "real ministry" that they are also overloaded with responsibilities in other areas of their lives. From this one's perspective, as with the illustration of the student in Chapter 4 who wanted to complete work duties instead of playing, play is considered frivolous activity. Care for this student can be expressed by incorporating play as necessary requirement in the curriculum, not as an option. Third, for the one who does not want her/his beliefs or practices challenged, play may help to foster a space for examining questions, and investigating ideas and beliefs. For this student, play in the form of role-playing and improvisation is a means to assume the identity or convictions of a person they would not ordinarily choose. Play is a way to invite those who are timid and reluctant, as well as those who are overly self-assured, into avenues of exploration that would otherwise be unavailable to them. My assumption is that each student brings a primary creativity to the work of ministry. Play can be a means to care for them and stir their imaginations to the exercise of responsible and ethically creative expression in ministry.

Several important components serve to motivate persons to engage in play practices. These include: acknowledging in the *course syllabus* that play is a practice to be introduced, reflected upon, and engaged in; and, making participation in play practices, both inside and outside the classroom, part of the *course grade*.

Now, we turn to an exploration of how, from a pastoral theological perspective, ministers provide care to misfit communities and for transitional times.

Caring for the Misfits: Communities and Transitions

We will explore, drawing upon notions already elaborated in the dissertation, some of the dimensions of caring for misfit communities and transitional times. Our exploration will include the following: caring for the misfit practices in the congregation, caring for the misfit minister and congregant, and caring for the transition of personal and corporate crises.

Misfit Practices in the Congregation

Through play, ministers may contribute to the care of misfit practices in congregations. As a pastor, I learned through immersion experience of the value that such activities as church dinners, bazaars, auctions, ice cream socials, and strawberry festivals have for parishioners. I soon realized that the minister's role in these events was not just decorative. I was expected to "mingle" with people, members of the church and others in the community, to help ensure feelings of good will. It was a diplomatic role, but one that at that time I judged to be largely tangential to the ministry of Word and Sacrament to which I had been called. I had assumed my ministry would be directed to the important matters of preaching, teaching, administration of the sacraments, corporate worship, and pastoral care to the sick, hurting, and distressed. I had no idea how to reflect on these practices with regard to my own pastoral identity and the mission and ministry of the church.

Play can help to illumine the purpose of these misfit practices. As we explored in Chapter 4, religious leaders need to be equipped for service in adaptive contexts since

many congregations are in the midst of transition. These misfit practices, in addition to providing much-needed finances for church budgets, provide an opportunity for the church to “play” in the community. These social events are playful because they provide persons the space to interact with one another freely. Further, these events promote spiritual growth because persons have the opportunity to experience the healing power of what Moltmann calls the “purpose-free fellowship” of the church.

At these events, people from the community meet with members of the congregation. As the pastor of the church, I had the opportunity to meet family members and neighbors who otherwise would not have entered the church building. Often I attended to matters of pastoral concern, such as listening to the story of a person’s illness, of a family tragedy, or providing a blessing for a birth or marriage. These misfit practices can serve the purpose of creating an intermediary space where congregation and community members can gather. The practices may provide a space in which pastoral caregiving occurs.

Caring for Misfits in Congregations

The perspective of play can illumine the experience of misfit persons within a congregation, those persons who stand on the edge of the community. A segment from a conversation I overheard between two members of a local congregation highlights the dilemma that is faced in regard to practicing Christianity. Consider this exchange:

Person #1: You have to practice the religion in order to be a Christian.

Person #2: Yes, and some people don’t like to participate in organized religion.

From a pastoral theological point of view, leaders can care for misfits in congregations by practicing Christianity so that there is sufficient room for variance and

difference among people. Traditional faith practices, such as participation in worship, Bible studies, mission opportunities, and prayer groups nurture many people in the congregation. But there are, as well, other practices that nurture those who stand on the edge of institutional religion. These persons need our care because they also are members of local congregations. For these persons, attending the services and practices of other religions and denominations can be enormously beneficial. This may entail, for instance, that a member takes a temporary leave from the practice of community worship to join a retreat on yoga, a practice from the east that focuses on energy movement in the body. As pastoral theologians, we care for the misfits in our communities through our endorsement and support of these endeavors. Engagement in practices outside the tradition can provide the necessary space for some persons to remain within the structure of organized Christian denominations. As we observed in Chapter 4, misfit ministers engage in practices—such as my venturing out into the new age shop to find and return with the oils—that may contribute to enhancing the ritual life of the community. In the same way, we need to care for the venturing out and returning of misfit congregants. This interplay enriches the practice of the Christian faith for some marginal persons.

Play as Care for Ritual

Play can be a means to care for our ritual practices. As we also explored in Chapter 4, play as sacred ritual serves to carry persons and communities through the ordinary and extraordinary transitions of life. Play, in short, helps us to bridge the gaps between where we are and where we want to be; between where we stand and where we are moving. Just as ritual provides a sense of stability and structure in the midst of a constantly evolving and complex world, so does play emerge into its fullness in

structured, although not rigid, contexts. Play, like ritual, has its own particular nuances and stylizations: play may be most satisfying to the human psyche and soul when it is infused with complexity, intricacy, and repetition. Play as a ritual form can provide a boundaried and care-filled space for persons to bring their longings and hopes as well as their sorrow and grief. In play, we can bring our whole selves, regardless of how fragmented and disjointed and wounded we may feel or be. We bring these selves as an offering, as one creative contribution to the transformation of the world. Play is similar to ritual in that it can hold the tensions of our personal and community life. Play, like ritual, can make use of the tensions to re-create our experience.

Care in the Midst of Crisis

Through play, ministers can care for others and themselves in times of national crisis. A dream image revealed early in this writing challenges me to reflect anew on the events of September 11, 2001. In a dream, standing at the School of Theology, I observe a plane crash into a city center, and I know from the angle at which it crashed that everyone on the plane, and many people on the ground, had probably died. Staying out of the way of traffic, I walk through the city up some very steep hills toward home. In conscious waking life, I felt stunned by my actions in the dream. How could I go home when there were so many people in need of help? I have served for many years as a minister, and have a strong proclivity to offer help and assistance to those who are in crisis or in need.

Yet, I also know the dream, considered in relation to the actual events of the terrorist attacks in Washington, D.C. and New York City, conveys a powerful message in the form of a paradox: Continuing to make our playful pilgrimage home can be a means

to help. This is not as facile as going to the places where we live, shutting the door, and ignoring events in the world. That would be far too literal an interpretation, and would suggest that our personal and corporate work can be easily completed. Rather, the playful means of our pilgrimage, of the living of our lives and engaging in our ministries of care and education, can itself be a gift to the world. By this, of course, I mean deep-hearted play—the play that springs from our beings as a resounding affirmation of life and all its possibilities for fullness with complete recognition of the horrors and pains that accompany this life. The means of our pilgrimage home will reflect who we are as persons and as communities. It is as simple as living authentically in the present moment: taking time to relax, experiencing a carriage ride in the park with children, speaking truthfully in a committee meeting, joining a human rights campaign about which we would like to learn and to which we would like to contribute. My vision of the pilgrimage home is not merely for the sake of us as individual persons, but rather on behalf of the creative play of all persons. In our playing, we may honor our lives and bless those with whom we live and work. In our playing, in the midst of great national tragedy, we may also awaken or reawaken to the recognition that our days are numbered and precious.

In our playing and ritual practice we may experience healing. Play may contribute to what Letty Russell calls the mending of creation,¹² and what Judaism refers to as *tikkun olam*, the healing of the earth. The healing power of play can emerge for persons in the context of safe and non-threatening relationships that ministers need to assume responsibility for helping to create. Play also contributes to healing because it is

¹² Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 196.

a means of developing relationships in community with others that can embrace the power and presence of pain, and still persistently make room for the expression of new life.

We now turn to practices that care for the spiritual life of misfit ministers, and seminarians.

Caring for Misfits Through Play: Spiritual Practices

Arguably the foundation of a theological education and the practice of ministry are the spiritual practices that inform our work. Here we will explore spiritual practices that can support the care of *healthy misfits*. Our exploration will include the following: caring for the practice of contemplative prayer, practicing and playing with words, creating a memory of play, and practicing laughter.

Caring for Contemplative Prayer

One person of a couple whose youngest son had just left for college commented to the other: "I am feeling homesick, but how can I be homesick when I am already home?"¹³ This is also the question of misfit ministers. Misfit ministers may also feel spiritual homesickness—longing for home—even as we provide pastoral care and leadership, guidance and support to parishioners, students, and others. It is important that theological educators help care for a sense of homesickness in pastors and students. The life-long hunger and yearning for continual development and spiritual growth, our homesickness, is of value to the whole church. Teaching persons to care for their lives of prayer is one means to care for this homesickness.

¹³ Personal communication with interviewee, 27 August 2001.

The practice of contemplative prayer is illustrative of this means of care. The ability to foster inner silence is an important quality for self-development, and for offering pastoral presence and care to others. Another purpose for developing a contemplative prayer life, especially for the misfit, is to know the truth of one's being. Often the misfit has felt the pain of being marginalized, experiencing one's vital and life-giving creativity subjected to derision. In order for our words to contribute to healing, they need to be connected to the stillness within.

Contemplative prayer can be a means of playing in our spiritual lives and caring for the homesickness. Father Thomas Keating, a teacher of contemplative prayer, suggests that this practice is a form of "divine therapy" that opens the human person to deeper, larger, vaster dimensions of two questions: "Who am I" and "Where am I in relation to God, to myself, and to others?"¹⁴ Cultivating the life of prayer has the benefit of linking psyche and soul, as does creative play. Play, as with prayer, is a means to live with, and care for, the ultimate questions of human life, and to nurture and sustain ourselves as misfits in ministry. In prayer, we care for the ultimate questions not by expounding upon them with cognitive and rational responses, but with reflection of the heart.

The practice of prayer may contribute to our ability to live with the unknown,¹⁵ which is a characteristic of play. The practice of prayer is one means to cultivate the character, inner resources, and wisdom necessary to embody what Letty Russell calls

¹⁴ Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition* (New York: Paulist Press), 29.

¹⁵ Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000), 372.

“full human dignity.”¹⁶ Prayer is a way to live with, and to play into, the unknown.

Prayer can be a means of play, and likewise, play can be a form of embodied prayer. We care for the spiritual practice of prayer in order to know God for ourselves and to teach others.¹⁷

Moreover, we care for the spiritual practice of prayer in order to develop further as religious misfits and caregivers: to hone our capacity to serve as interpathic listeners in a world overwhelmed in words. As we practice silent or contemplative prayer, we may increase our ability to listen to all the “chatter” in our own minds that often interferes with the ability to listen to the still small voice of God as well as the ability to listen to other people. The purpose in the listening is not to eliminate the internal conversation, but to know its resonances so that we are not held captive to its power. That is, our minds are continuously producing thoughts in the form of judgements, opinions, analysis about ourselves and other people. In fact, we think so much that we often assume that our thoughts comprise who we are. The practice of silent prayer does not eliminate the production of thoughts, but provides an internal “intermediary space” in which we hear our thoughts—our internal conversation—for what it is. Then, in this “internal play space” we make room for the genuine encounter, a care-filled ministry of presence, with others. The practice of prayer assists, in a metaphorical way, with making our ears bigger and our mouths smaller. Julia Ching, in her book on Chinese religions, describes an image of an ancient wisdom figure that provides illustration for what I am advocating

¹⁶ Letty M. Russell, “From Garden to Table,” in *Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens*, ed. Letty M. Russell et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 150.

¹⁷ See Jerome W. Berryman, “Silence is Stranger than It Used to Be: Teaching Silence and the Future of Humankind,” *Religious Education* 94 (Summer 1999): 257-72.

here.¹⁸ The large bronze figure, which is several thousand years old, has very large ears. This figure signifies in art form the wisdom that comes with inner listening.

Playing with Words

A second spiritual practice that can support the misfit minister is playing with words. As we explored in Chapter 4, Whitehead suggests that propositional language lures us through feeling. So, carefully chosen words—words that inspire us and call us to play—need to be practiced. Theological educators might encourage the practice of playing with words by inviting students, for instance, to engage in creative writing projects that spark the imagination. I have come to realize more deeply my own misfithood with regard to language as I have engaged in this writing project. Creative misfits enjoy using words that are imaginative and feeling. This explains my own proclivity for metaphors, stories, and images. We have to practice the use of our words because they carry the power to hurt as well as to heal. The practice of playing with words might include writing in a personal journal as well as reading and writing poetry. This practice of playing with words also suggests that misfits need to find means to give birth to and to nurture meaningful words.

Playing with words—speaking them, writing them, reading them—can be a way for misfits to come to know words that speak truth for us. As Freire argues, the expression of true words is a liberating action that has the power to transform the world. Dialogue and conscientization within the pedagogy we have explored can contribute to one central task for ministry: to embody the Word, the Word born of silence and chaos,

¹⁸ Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 17.

the Word that can be found moving through our minds, bodies, emotions, fantasies, and imaginations. Misfit ministers embody this Living Word.

Creating a Memory of Play

Misfits need to practice cultivating a memory of play. Through habit, we may tend to talk more easily about troubles than we talk about joys. Usually, we are trying to dispose of our problems. We want to get rid of them. It may be difficult to hold both the pain and joy together in our lives. Especially with misfits, whose life experiences bear the marks of pain and exclusion, it can be important to foster a playful habit of mind, so as to create a memory of play. The purpose of pastoral education in a cultural context that does not value play must start modestly. As we practice playing, our bodies may develop the capacity to remember play. An example illustrates the point. When I first started swimming ten years ago, I was only able to swim a few laps before I became tired. With practice, I gradually increased the length and duration of my exercise regime. Now my body remembers these experiences of exercise play. Without regular exercise, my body becomes agitated and restless because the body memory indicates that it is time to play.

In our practicing of play, we may create new memories. This practice does not suggest that ministers and students will no longer have problems or difficulties. Rather, our practice of play continually infuses our life experience—reforms and integrates it—so that we are, in fact, creating new memories. Problems and challenges that inevitably come our way do not need to bind us.

One purpose in cultivating a memory of play is illustrated by the insight of a therapist who works with couples.¹⁹ In therapy with couples, the clinician begins with

¹⁹ Personal communication with interviewee, 24 July 2001.

the necessary healing of painful dynamics and miscommunication in the relationship. Once this level of work is sufficiently complete, the therapist directs couples to reflect on occasions when they experience joy together. Many people have trouble with this aspect of their relationship because it carries them into the realm of the unknown, the unexplored. Even when people want to move away from the dynamics of pain, hurt, and miscommunication, the familiarity with the terrain often draws them back. We may prefer, at times, to remain in our pain and misery because we may be more familiar with its contours. This dynamic may, however, prevent misfit ministers from opening themselves to other aspects of experience. Creating a memory of play can be an intentional means to help make room in our lives for occasions of surprise, elation, and ecstasy. Creating a memory of play helps to make room for joy.

Laughter and Humor

Laughter and humor are spiritual practices that can sustain the misfit. The freedom of humanity to play arises from the freedom of a God who plays.²⁰ The misfit, who stands "in-beyond," as Jung Young Lee describes transformed marginality, lives constantly with a certain degree of paradox. For this reason, misfit existence opens us to the possibility of negotiating incongruities. We are prepared to practice the classical virtue of *eutrapelia*,²¹ which is translated as wit and versatility, and which allows us to stand on the middle ground between making fools of ourselves and being completely inflexible. But this laughter and humor, as the ancient virtue of *eutrapelia* makes clear,

²⁰ Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967). Rahner argues that a theology of a playful humanity emerges from the activity of a playful God.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

should not demean and de-humanize other persons.²² The practices are meant for the sharing of pleasure in community with others.

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the story of misfits in ministry is a tragicomedy: the story line contains elements of tragedy as well as comedy. Practicing our humor and laughter is one means for navigating the challenges in life and ministry, for not taking ourselves too seriously, and for experiencing intimations of God's presence—glimpses of God playing hide-and-seek with humanity."²³ But in our practice of laughter and humor we need also to stay alert, and be held accountable by others, to the ways that this practice can be potentially harmful.

The experience of laughter and humor can arise from recognition of the incongruities and inconsistencies of life.²⁴ Sometimes ministers need to practice laughing. Sometimes we can teach others to laugh by allowing ourselves to do so freely and spontaneously in contexts of care and education. Laughter and the expression of humor are often expressions that we are playing. Misfit ministers are certainly not the only ones to laugh. But to laugh in spite of all the other challenges that face us is, to be sure, a misfit gift. When we do so, we participate in an experience of our shared humanity.

The following story illumines the possibilities and pitfalls of laughter and humor as a spiritual practice in pastoral care. As a pastor in an upstate New York parish, I once visited a parishioner who had been admitted to the Intensive Care Unit of the regional hospital. Susan, a generally affable person, had been experiencing heart problems.

²² Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 215.

²³ *Ibid.*, 214.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

During the course of our conversation, Susan said something that was funny. So naturally, I laughed. My laughter sparked her laughter and together we were joined in an experience of joyful revelry. I know the laughter was restorative and healing for Susan because she later commented that it made her feel more “at home” even in the unfamiliar surroundings of the hospital. As the charge nurse for the unit gestured for us to be quiet, I also realized that the joy and laughter could possibly be a disturbance to others in our midst.

The experience highlights both a caution and invitation when playing within the context of pastoral care ministry. Ministers need to proceed with care. The practice of laughter is not always warranted or wanted. In this example, the environment itself was not entirely conducive to play. The proximity to other patients, the seriousness of physical illness, and a general attitude on the part of the healthcare professionals, made for a complex situation. It would be inappropriate to continue to practice laughter under these circumstances, regardless of its benefits. The example points out the limits to practice of playful laughter. It also shows that ministers and parishioners can enter this place space together. The invitation to misfit ministers is to practice laughter and stay open to the possibility of its expression in ministry. In spite of the circumstances, Susan and I entered a space of play. Our playful laughter needed to stop, but that does not in any way diminish or discount the power of the experience we shared together. The practice of playful laughter needs to be properly contained so that it does not become a habitual means to avoid the serious and complex issues of ministry. When we care well for laughter and humor, these qualities can enhance our experience of joy, and help buffer against the difficult challenges that face religious leaders.

The practice of humor and laughter is one means to play and enjoy God. These practices may allow us to participate more fully in creation, where we meet and greet the face of the Divine who comes to us in lures and invitations. In play, we may open our spirits to the Divine One who is always and forever at the center of our hearts weaving and playing, singing and dancing, inviting and welcoming, renewing the challenge. Play, for me, is a matter of allowing the creative, surging, chaotic, mystical energy of the universe to move through, within, and among us. The heart of the matter is summarized in the opening lines of The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith: the chief end of humanity is to praise God and enjoy God forever. I have needed, and continue to need, to practice enjoyment in my daily life.

In this chapter, we have explored elements of a pastoral theology of play with misfits. We have expanded on Alastair Campbell's image of the wise fool to examine how play can expand and contribute to the image. We have explored particular aspects of wisdom that misfits contribute to the soul of ministry. Further, we have considered the care of misfits in the seminary context as well as clinical pastoral settings. We have examined means of care for misfit communities and transitional spaces. Finally, we have explored spiritual practices that can support the play of the misfit minister. In the next chapter, we turn to concluding remarks, reflections on this theoretical journey, and fruitful directions for future research.

CHAPTER 7

Rounding Third Base: Summary, Reflections, and Research

The history of ideas is a history of mistakes.

Alfred North Whitehead. *Adventures of Ideas*

[People] who are too serious are the first to break.

Shusaku Endo. *Deep River*

Wholehearted play has the power to transform your life.

Dainin Katagiri. *You Have to Say Something*

I learned the value of playing music by ear from my great-grandmother, Celia Sherwood. She was a talented musician, a gifted pianist, who learned to play as a young girl. For many years, she played for dances throughout Amador County, California. Grandma Celia's gift of music brought joy to many people. Even well into her 90's with hearing and eyesight diminishing, Celia would sit at the piano as her fingers would dance seemingly by instinct across the keys. It was music of the heart, played by ear.

One overarching purpose for this dissertation is to help cultivate persons, qualities, and experiences that can influence the capacity to engage play responsibly and ethically in ministry. A pastoral theology of play, as the image above suggests, can help to capacitate misfit persons with the increasing ability to "play by ear"—to trust the music of the soul—and thereby bring this practiced, and still spontaneous, wisdom forth in ministry. In this concluding chapter, I summarize the main points developed in the dissertation, reflect on the journey of the writing, and propose directions for future research.

Summary of the Main Points

We revisit the main themes that have been explored in this dissertation. A review of relevant literature in the field suggested the need for investigation into the topic of play with regard to adults in theological education. We examined the use of appropriate language to name healthy psychic life, and found that vitality is a more suitable term than normalcy. Further, we looked at the role of the misfit emotions and the importance they have for the exercise of religious leadership. We examined in detail the role that grief has in the psychic life of misfit persons. The process of grieving can allow misfits gradually to release attachment to external standards that can be harmful to personal and communal well being, and can open the heart to the experience of play. The psychological theory of D.W. Winnicott informed our understanding of the development of selfhood, space for living, and a means to negotiate transitions. Finally, we briefly examined how systems can support the emergence of creative persons.

The argument continued into the literature and topic of leadership theory. We grounded the focus of leadership in a theological worldview that values play since the formation of persons for creative leadership requires the development of soul. We examined that creative leadership emerges from a theological vision that images a Creative God. We examined how the creativity of leadership draws from a relational as opposed to a unilateral form of power. From this analysis, we considered ways in which being able to affect and be affected by persons is a hallmark of play and relational power. We examined how a model of adaptive leadership is closely linked with play in its ability to provide direction and vision in the midst of changing community contexts. Finally, we examined playful practices that can support the expression of vital ritual leadership.

Since creative leadership depends on a sound pedagogical theory, we turned in Chapter 5 to explore a theory of education for the misfit theological student. We examined how the principles of dialogue and conscientization can support the emergence and discovery/learning of the religious misfit. The discussion was contextualized within CPE, a locus for theological education. We explored Jurgen Moltmann's theology of play for the support and critique it lends to the education of religious leaders. Furthermore, we considered playful educational practices that can support the emergence of creativity in contexts of clinical education and theological seminaries. Finally, we examined limits to this theory of education.

Weaving among the theory and practices we considered in the previous chapters, we turned in Chapter 6 to a pastoral theological analysis of care for misfit ministers, theological students, and communities. We examined the aspects of wisdom that emerge from the playful cultivation of misfits. Holding prominent the pastoral theological perspective, we examined various dimensions of caring for the misfit theological student, misfit practices in the congregation, and misfit congregants. We concluded with spiritual practices that can support misfit ministers.

Reflections

I turn to some of my reflections on the development of this writing, and what I have learned from the project. I initially felt like I fell on the topic of play, misfithood, and theological education (stumbled, of course, with the consistent and unwavering support of my advisor and other members of the faculty). In many ways, I have felt like I have been playing—off-balance, somewhere between here and there—ever since. Over the course of the past year, I have not found myself wavering or tiring of the subject I

have chosen to pursue. If anything, I feel more captivated than before, enthusiastic about the research questions that continue to arise.

With regard to the theoretical method employed in the dissertation, I proposed using a method that I called “orchestrated engagement,” a scholarly means of examining literature and human experience from a variety of disciplines and sources. This multi-disciplinary endeavor is itself a means of play. I would revise the method at this point and reclaim the phrase that I initially planned to use, but I thought it did not sound sufficiently academic: *orchestrated chaos*. *Why the difference in emphasis?*

Orchestrated engagement refers to the way I have approached the topic of misfithood and play: assembling materials from a variety of sources and mining them for insights. The research has taken me in many different directions, and for this reason, it has seemed chaotic. The means by which I have worked with the material is through consistent engagement. This actual method might be appropriately called “orchestrated engagement of chaos.”

An immensely beneficial part of the research for this dissertation has been the actual experience of playing with words. I have come to value, with intensity and pleasure, the imaginative and playful wanderings of my own mind. I have come to fill out my own skin as a young scholar. I have discovered that writing is a means of play and discovery for me.

Playing with words has developed my own voice as a misfit minister, educator, and pastoral theologian. If I had to do it differently, I would have trusted my voice much sooner. For some, like me, though, it takes writing a doctoral dissertation to know the power of my own voice. The experience has taught me to exercise more patience with

myself, for in the course of time, the chaos of not knowing gives way to clarity. This wisdom, gleaned from the psychological theory of Winnicott—of staying with the formless experience—is applicable, for me at least, to the practice of writing as well as to the insights developed in psychotherapy.

I began the dissertation with the claims to argue a partial solution to problem of navigating between conformity and idiosyncrasy and also to tell the story of misfit ministers in ministry. I was initially uncomfortable using the language of argument to make my point, although I have used the language in the text. The term “argument” sounded too rational to describe and interpret a phenomenon as non-rational as play. I have also used the language of “telling story” to describe the work I am doing here. In fact, the childhood elementary school practice of “show and tell” has been supportive to me as I have written and imagined an audience for this text, and as I have imagined myself a teacher “showing” and “telling” others. So the text includes both kinds of language, even if that is not necessarily apparent to the reader. Upon further reflection, though, the presence of argument language and story language makes sense to me: the text is, as well, a misfit—not solely argument or story, but both—telling a story of misfits and making an argument for why we are needed in ministry.

Moreover, I have struggled in the text with maintaining the critical edge, the intersection between personal and public space. Religious leaders need to be present to persons—friendly, approachable, and engaged with the issues and concerns of others—while simultaneously, concerning themselves with the maintenance of appropriate, respectful, and professional boundaries. This is as it should be. The point here is: this is also an issue in writing about ministry. I have conveyed stories of my own experience in

ministry, and I have sought to express the value of play for the formation of ministers and for the development of contexts conducive to the support of ethically faithful and fruitful Christian life. The critical edge for me in the writing has been to communicate the value of play—including my own experience of it—while not assuming that all persons or communities will share this view given their own history and experience.

Exploring Future Research

This playful and play-filled endeavor has been an enormously soul-enriching experience for me personally, and my hope is that it will contribute to the strengthening of the soulful practice of ministry, by and for the misfits. With this in mind, let me offer a number of gestures toward future scholarly and practical exploration of this work.

The first direction relates to courses I would teach. My own inspiration from some of the material explored in Chapter 3 in regard to creativity, particularly the triangle of creativity as elaborated by Howard Gardner, was a result of a course I audited in “Creativity and Innovation” at the Drucker School of Management at the Claremont Graduate University. The instructor, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, a research psychologist, has dedicated his scholarly career to the study of creativity. In that course, I began to wonder about the possibilities for teaching a course on creativity and innovation in pastoral theology, care, and counseling. What does creativity look like in the ministry? What are some of the practices that support it? Some of my reflections are born in the pages of this dissertation.

The research suggests the teaching of a course that relates to the use of artistic images in pastoral theology, care, and counseling. In the writing of this text, I have encountered rich images as I have plumbed the depths of experience, my own and that of

other persons. These images can also serve the purpose of healing in contexts of pastoral care. I can envision a course that explores the intersection between art and pastoral care, for example. We would explore pastoral and theological implications of artistic images along with the actual practices of painting, drawing, and creative writing.

Another possible direction for implementation of research is within the context of CPE. Many of the illustrations and suggestions with regard to a process of liberatory education draw from my clinical supervisory experience in CPE as a training supervisor. The theoretical/practical suggestions I develop could be of benefit to a current CPE program or one that has not yet been developed. I maintain a high level of commitment to the experience of clinical learning. This educational experience has contributed to my own ministerial development and to the growth and maturation of numerous chaplain interns with whom I have had the privilege of working. Given the value of this model of clinical learning, I propose a creative expansion on the predominant practice of CPE in the clinical context (read: mainly hospitals). That is, most clinical learning sites are located within hospitals, and students engage in ministry primarily to the patients and families in this context. I envision that a liberatory model of CPE could be implemented in the context of a theological seminary. A trained supervisor would establish and coordinate the curriculum, and draw as well on the knowledge of other members of the theological faculty who would, in turn, present didactic sessions based upon their area of expertise. Students would have the choice of clinical placements within a broad range of settings, including local churches and social service agencies. Within this context, students, faculty, and supervisory staff would actually engage in dialogue and conversation, as well as encounter the difficulties and possible impasses, in relation to ministerial issues and

struggles. In addition, the trained supervisor/pastoral theologian would coordinate the input and expertise of other faculty members in theology, psychological theory, leadership studies, and education in order to prepare persons to offer care in a variety of ministerial settings. What I am suggesting, therefore, is an expansion of this beneficial model of theological education. I leave it to my clinical colleagues to explore further this proposal.

Another fruitful avenue of research that I did not explicitly explore in the dissertation is another “type” of religious misfit: theological students who serve in capacities of ministry and are enrolled in study sequences other than the M.Div. and ordination program. Various denominations have programs that support the development of these ministers. For example, the United Methodist Church offers programs for the development of diaconal ministers as well as a program, called “Course of Study,” for persons training for ministry who are not able to complete the standard theological degree. Similarly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a Commissioned Lay Preachers program, designed to equip lay persons with theological training in order to serve in specific ministerial locations. Requirements for the various denominational programs vary. For the most part, students in these programs are serving, or are preparing to serve, congregations and communities that would not otherwise be able to support a “traditionally” prepared and ordained minister for a number of reasons, including financial constraints and desirability of ministry location. My “mental picture” of misfit theological students and ministers did not consider their struggles and challenges directly in this research project. My work suggests another fruitful area of research in the area of lay leadership development in the church. The foundational theory of Ronald Heifetz on

adaptive leadership explored in Chapter 4 could be further developed for the formation of lay leaders in the local congregation.

The research invites exploration of the first person narratives of religious misfits. A qualitative study, focused on the ministry of selected religious leaders, could be conducted to examine the stories and practices of actual misfit ministers. Play, as I have defined and explored it in this dissertation, may or may not have any particular significance for their capacity to exercise religious leadership.

A useful direction for research includes the development of an empirical study on the topic of play. My suggestion follows the call of Larry VandeCreek and associates who provide helpful and useful means for developing studies in the field of pastoral care and counseling.¹ While my own theological formation has emphasized theoretical reflection, explorations in other methods are valuable for the work ministry and pastoral leadership. Quantitative research has a role in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling.

This leads me to another angle of research. As a pastoral theologian, I would welcome the opportunity to reflect regularly with pastors and religious leaders, particularly those who are marginalized, in order to examine whether the play practices explored in this writing offer theoretical/practical support to persons in their ministries. Engagement with other practicing professionals would provide further material for my own research. Participation in this type of action research stems from my desire to stay connected with the concerns of practitioners.

¹ Larry VandeCreek et al., *Research in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Atlanta: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1994).

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